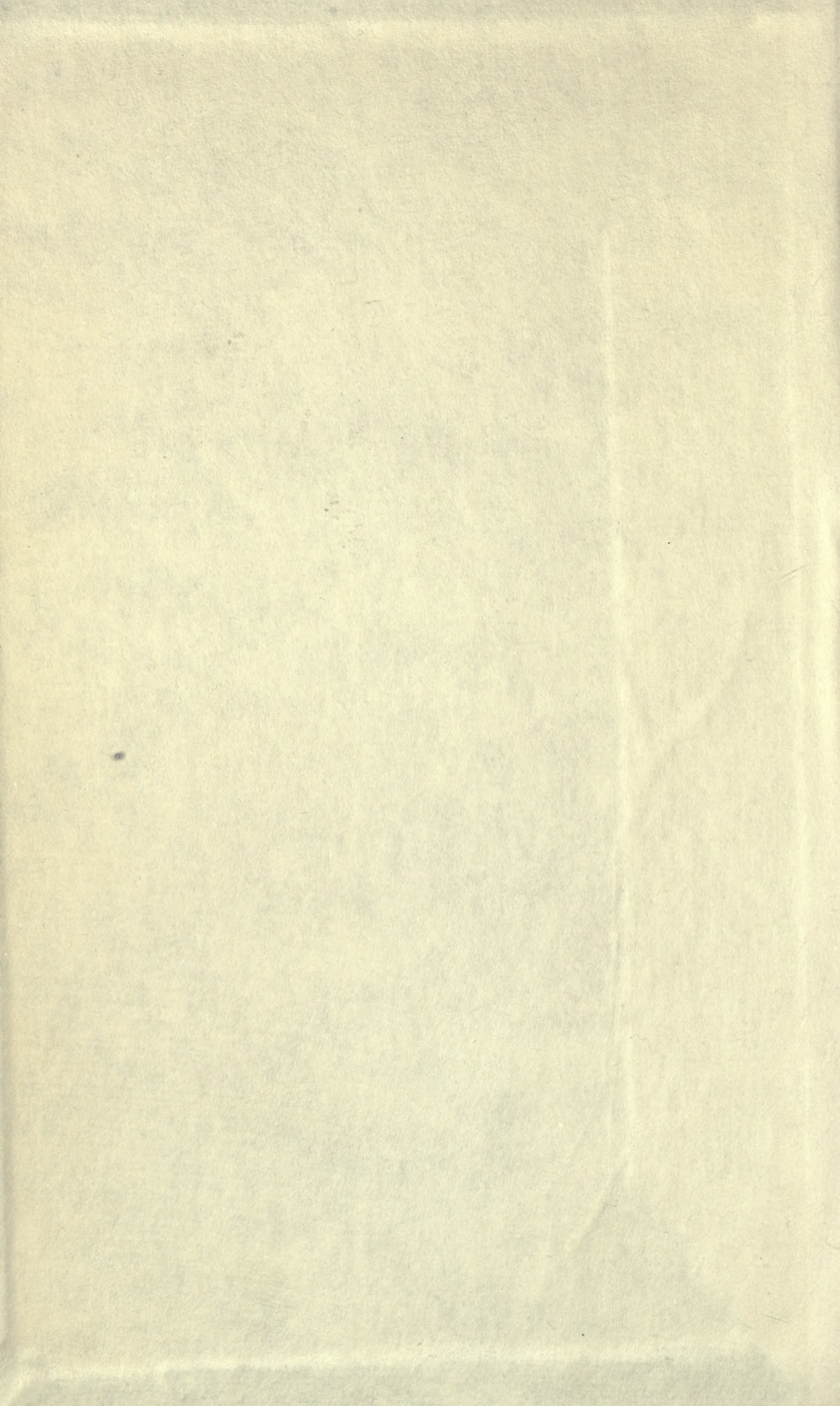




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THE CORRESPONDENCE OF
WILLIAM COWPER

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WILLIAM COWPER

ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL
ORDER, WITH ANNOTATIONS

BY THOMAS WRIGHT

PRINCIPAL OF COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY

AUTHOR OF 'THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COWPER,' ETC.

IN FOUR VOLUMES
VOLUME III

65-999
8/7/03

LONDON
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
27 PATERNOSTER ROW
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Edinburgh: T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

April 1, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have made you wait long for an answer, and am now obliged to write in a hurry. But lest my longer silence should alarm you, hurried as I am, still I write. I told you, if I mistake not, that the circle of my correspondence has lately been enlarged ; and it seems still increasing, which, together with my poetical business, makes an *hour* a *momentous* affair. Pardon an unintentional pun. You need not fear for my health. It suffers nothing by my employment. I hope also that you have no need to fear lest I should hereafter suffer by disappointment. No care shall be wanting on my part to guard against it. I return you many thanks for all your friendly services in the matter of subscription. When you saw Johnson that business was so much in its infancy, that it was not likely that many names should have been entered in his book. Neither General Cowper, nor his son, nor Lady Hesketh have yet given in their lists. The latter has now communicated a few names at Johnson's, and probably a few at Walker's also, and at Debrett's, for the present honour of the catalogue, and that

they may breed more. But the bulk of their collection is still in reserve. In the meantime they give me the warmest encouragement, and have no doubt themselves of a numerous subscription.—That the price should be thought too high, I must rather wonder. The immense labour of the work considered, and the price of Pope's first edition also considered, which was seven guineas, it does not appear to me extravagant. I question if there is a poet in the three kingdoms, or in any kingdom, who would sell such a commodity for less. Two or three guineas may now perhaps be as important as seven were fifty years ago, and I suppose that they are; but if every thing else is grown dearer, why should the produce of the brain in particular grow cheap? We may comfort ourselves, too, with reflecting that twenty subscribers at two guineas are just as good as forty at one.

We, who in general see no company, are at present in expectation of a great deal; at least, if three different visits may be called so. Mr. and Mrs. Powley, in the first place, are preparing for a journey southward. She is far from well, but thinks herself well enough to travel, and feels an affectionate impatience for another sight of Olney. A long time since I desired Johnson to send a volume of *The Task* to your house, intended for Mr. Powley. Mr. Emsal was to have taken it with him into the north, but Mr. Powley has not received it, so I suppose that Johnson forgot. I shall be obliged to you if you will let me know.

In the next place, we expect, as soon as the season shall turn up bright and warm, General Cowper and his son. I have not seen him these twenty years

and upwards; but our intercourse having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever.

Lady Hesketh also comes down in June; and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer residence. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well; and because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me.

I wish you,—we both wish you, all happiness in your new habitation: at least, you will be sure to find the situation more commodious. I thank you for all your hints concerning my work, which shall be duly attended to. You may assure all whom it may concern, that all offensive elisions will be done away. With Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, I remain, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

April 3, Mond., 1786.

HAVE you the hardiness to bid me wait till August for your coming, or even to suggest such an idea to me, who have been so long numbering off days and weeks with impatient expectation of June? My cousin, I will not wait till August, neither can Mrs. Unwin wait till August. I insist, and she entreats, that you come at the time appointed. Is there any thing future to which we look forward with equal pleasure? With pleasure, indeed, we expect the

General ; I have not, save yourself, a friend whom I should expect with more ; but you with pleasure peculiar and above all. Come then ! difficulties will perhaps vanish at your appearance ; fifty points may be adjusted when you are on the spot, not one of which can be touched without you. Of this be sure, that by some means or other you shall have a place at Olney. The project in hand will probably in the end succeed, and if it should not, others may be started, but not till you come. You have given a hope that will not be relinquished while in Olney may be found one brick or stone upon another. A lodging for the present is ready for you, even should you come to-morrow.

I love you, and thank you for all your hints concerning the General. Suspect not from any thing said above, that my affection for him is not as warm as you wish it to be. It is ; and will, I doubt not, increase in fervour. But with him I have an intimacy to make. With you I have always had one, however long interrupted, and the place that you have held with me, you will ever hold, should we outlive the years of Methusalem. But, as I said, I thank you for those hints, and if he have any little likings to be gratified (for who has not some ?) you cannot do a kinder thing by us than to give us instruction in them all ; for we sincerely wish to make his abode here as pleasant to him as possible. Henry comes with him. Give me a little history of *him* also, for him I have never seen since he was an urchin. As to the affair of religious conversation, fear me not lest I should trespass upon his peace in that way. Your views, my dear, upon the subject of a proper conduct in that particular,

are mine also. When I left St. Albans, I left it under impressions of the existence of a God, and of the truth of Scripture, that I had never felt before. I had unspeakable delight in the discovery, and was impatient to communicate a pleasure to others that I found so superior to every thing that bears the name. This eagerness of spirit, natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to many. Forgetting that I had not *those* blessings at my command, which it is God's peculiar prerogative to impart—spiritual light and affections, I required, in effect, of all with whom I conversed that they should see with my eyes ; and stood amazed that the Gospel, which with me was all in all, should meet with opposition, or should occasion disgust in any. But the Gospel could not be the word of God if it did not ; for it foretells its own reception among men, and describes it as exactly such. Good is intended, but harm is done too often by the zeal with which I was at that time animated. But as in affairs of this life, so in religious concerns likewise, experience begets some wisdom in all who are not incapable of being taught. I do not now, neither have I for a long time, made it my practice to force the subject of evangelical truth on any. I received it not from man myself, neither can any man receive it from me. God is light, and from him all light must come : to *His* teaching, therefore, I leave those with whom I was once so alert to instruct myself. If a man asks my opinion, or calls for an account of my faith, he shall have it ; otherwise I trouble him

not. Pulpits for preaching, and the parlour, the garden, and the walk abroad for friendly and agreeable conversation.

I am grieved at what you tell me of the General's state of health. I fear that he carries his death's wound about him. The precariousness of *his* life makes me feel, if possible, the more comfort that yours seems to be held by a stronger tenure. May you be spared as long as I am spared, for having found you again, I am determined never to lose you more. I am delighted too that my uncle at his years is so stout. May he long continue so !

Mr. Madan and I were never correspondents. Once or twice, however, I have had an occasional letter from him, and last Friday brought me another. I was, as you may suppose, surprised. He wrote merely to rectify, as he accounts it, my typography. *Placed* he would have printed *plac'd*, and so of all words terminating in *ed*, and usually in former times abridged. But I shall not accede,—I cannot, indeed, to his counsel. Johnson long since, and the General lately, recommended to me the contrary practice ; and the fashion of the day makes it necessary. It is also a real improvement, for the judgment corrects the eye, and in reading reduces the syllables to their just number : add to which, we have no need to make pronunciation of our language more difficult to foreigners than it is of necessity, which yet must be the certain consequence of spelling one way and pronouncing another. For *plac'd*, according to the rule by which we make *c* before a consonant hard, ought to pronounced *plackd*. But too much of this. He wrote me a dry letter ; but *some things* considered, it did him honour

in my account, because it proves that he interests himself in my work, notwithstanding all.

I wrote, my dearest cousin, to the General on Saturday, and then told him that he would not receive my bundle of poetry in less than a fortnight. At that time I thought of detaining the third, fourth, and fifth books till I should have re-revised the first, and then that I would send them all at once. But I have changed my mind. Fuseli is at present out of work. It would not be civil to make him wait long for more, and the three last-mentioned books are ready; I shall, therefore, as before, send them to you; you will communicate with the General; and he to Fuseli. They will set off on Wednesday by Wellingborough coach. The first quire destined to Dr. Maty's inspection I am now going to take in hand. Should I find it necessary to transcribe the whole or much of it, that business, and the correction of it together, will necessarily take time, but you shall have it as soon as possible. My dear, stroke my pate, and say that I am a good child. I send you, I suppose, above two thousand lines, and not two hundred in the whole of the first translation. In fact, I am making a new translation, and find that the work will be much a gainer by it. I grudge no pains so that I may be but a famous poet, and make you as proud as I wish you to be of your cousin in a corner. *Apropos de ça*—if I have not visited my neighbours, it has been owing to many lions in the way; to a dread of strangers, increased by having seen none for many years; to a total incapacity through indisposition, but very lately, in part, removed; and to necessity, arising from the following

important consideration, I keep no horse, and the hackneys of Olney are not ostensible; chaises are become more expensive than ever, and some of the country gentlemen (Mr. Wrighte¹ in particular) who have made advances, live too distant to be reached on foot. I have not sent to Kerr for these reasons; he depended, by his own avowal, principally on emetics, which seem to fail, though I have neither exceeded nor fallen short; the tincture that he has given me is, by his account of it, of two that are the best in the world for stomach cases, the most efficacious; therefore, nothing better is to be expected from him of that kind: and the approaching summer gives me hope better founded than any I can build upon medicine, of open pores, and consequently of relief, if not of a cure. My fever is not worth a thought: I suppose I have had more or less of it almost all my life.—I am now rummaging things together.—I dedicate to whomsoever you shall choose.—I have two dozen of wine and four bottles.—If you should call at Debrett's, pray search the book for the name of Throckmorton in particular. I knew not that Sephus² had so ennobled my subscription, till you told me. I hold myself much obliged to him, and so shall tell him, when time shall serve. I love and honour my uncle for his very handsome notice of me on the occasion. Our politics do not jar; in principle we are two tallies. I only differ from you a little touching the king's head. He had, through ill advice or want of honesty, acted with great duplicity. He was either to reign or die; there was no alternative. None dared to trust

¹ Of Gayhurst.

² Mr. Hill.

him;—the axe was the consequence. Adieu, my dear fellow-pilgrim in all our pleasant places, for such you shall be.—Ever affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

I tell you a remarkable coincidence of dates and events: I received your present of wine on my birthday, November 26; the desk on the 7th of December, the day when I left London; and my snuff-box, etc., from Anonymous on the 24th of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant. I cannot bear to be so concise as want of room obliged me to be on the other side, respecting the wine. Your kindness in making the inquiry is to me better than the wine itself: this is a literal truth, and you may credit it without the least reserve. I had a little of my own when the hamper came, which is the cause of my present abundance. Once more bless you!

The most evident necessity presents itself for your coming in June. We just now learn that these clever apartments cannot be had. The son is to succeed the apprentice in the second chamber. We have offered a bed in our house during your stay, but it is not accepted. There is a tight little house opposite, which I dare say you may have, that will hold you and suite, but it has a west aspect. Perhaps by open windows and curtains it might be kept cool. Mother and daughter only live in it.

Mrs. Unwin begs me to give her most affectionate respects. If you understood Latin, I could tell you, in an elegant line from Horace, how much

we both think of you, and talk of you, and long to see you. Dearest cousin, adieu!

We have expedients *in petto* for settling you at Olney, some of which will surely succeed, but which we will not discuss till you come—that is to say—in June. This is positively the last postscript.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Olney, April 5, 1786.

I DID, as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homeric undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind a hundred different ways, and, in every way in which it would present itself, found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium and the imputation of arrogance; foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing.

W. C.

P.S.—You may well wonder at my courage, who have undertaken a work of such enormous length. You would wonder more if you knew that I translated the whole *Iliad* with no other help than a Clavis. But I have since equipped myself better for this immense journey, and am revising the work in company with a good commentator.

TO LADY HESKETH

Monday, April 10, 1786.

THAT's my good cousin! now I love you! now I will think of June as you do, that it is the pleasantest

of all months, unless you should happen to be here in November too, and make it equally delightful. Before I shall have finished my letter, Mrs. Unwin will have taken a view of the house concerning which you inquire, and I shall be able to give you a circumstantial account of it. The man who built it is lately dead. He had been a common sailor, and assisted under Wolfe and Amherst at the taking of Quebec. When we came hither he was almost penniless, but climbing by degrees into the lace-business, amassed money, and built the house in question. Just before he died, having an enterprising genius, he put almost his whole substance to hazard in sending a large cargo of lace to America, and the venture failing, he has left his widow in penury and distress. For this reason, I conclude that she will have no objection to letting as much of her house as my cousin will have occasion for, and have therefore given you this short history of the matter. The bed is the best in the town, and the honest tar's folly was much laughed at, when it was known that he, who had so often swung in a hammock, had given twenty pounds for a bed. But now I begin to hope that he made a wiser bargain than once I thought it. She is no gentlewoman, as you may suppose, but she is nevertheless a very quiet, decent, sober body, and well respected among her neighbours.

But Hadley, my dearest cousin, what is to be said of Hadley? Only this at present, that having such an inhabitant as Mr. Burrows, and the hope belonging to it of such another inhabitant as yourself, it has all charms, all possible recommendations. Yes; had I the wings that David wished for, I would

surely stretch them to their utmost extent that I might reach any place where I should have you to converse with perhaps half the year. But alas, my dear, instead of wings, I have a chain and a collar; the history of which collar and chain Mrs. Unwin shall give you when you come; else I would fly, and she would fly also, with the utmost alacrity to Hadley, or whithersoever you should call us, for Olney has no hold upon us in particular. Here have we no family connections, no neighbours with whom we can associate, no friendships. If the country is pleasant, so also are other countries; and so far as income is concerned, we should not, I suppose, find ourselves in a more expensive situation at Hadley, or any where, than here. But there are lets and hindrances which no power of man can remove, which will make your poor heart ache, my dear, when you come to know them. I will not say that they can never be removed, because I will not set bounds to that which has no bounds—the mercy of God; but of the removal of them there is no present apparent probability. I knew a Mr. Burrows once; it was when I lived in the Temple; so far knew him that we simpered at each other when we met, and on opposite sides of the way touched hats. This Mr. Burrows, though at that time a young man, was rather remarkable for corpulence, and yet tall. He was at the bar. On a sudden I missed him, and was informed soon after that he had taken orders. Is it possible that your Mr. Burrows and mine can be the same? The imagination is not famous for taking good likenesses of persons and faces that we never saw. In general the picture that we draw in our minds of an *inconnu* is of all possible pictures the

most unlike the original. So it has happened to me in this instance: my fancy assured me that Mr. Burrows was a slim, elegant young man, dressed always to the very point of exactness, with a sharp face, a small voice, a delicate address, and the gentlest manners. Such was my dream of Mr. Burrows, and how my dream of him came to be such I know not, unless it arose from what I seemed to have collected out of the several letters in which you have mentioned him. From them I learned that he has wit, sense, taste, and genius, with which qualities I do not generally connect the ideas of bulk and rotundity; and from them I also learned that he has numerous connections at your end of the town, where the company of those who have anything rough in their exterior is least likely to be coveted. So it must have come to pass that I made to myself such a very unsuitable representation of him. But I am not sorry that he is such as he is. He is no loser by the bargain, in my account. I am not the less delighted with his high approbation, and wish for no better fortune as a poet, than always so to please such men as Mr. Burrows. I will not say, my dear, that you yourself gain any advantage in my opinion by the difference; for to seat you higher there than you were always seated, is not possible. I will only observe in this instance, as always in all instances, I discover a proof of your own good sense and discernment, who finding in Mr. Burrows a mind so deserving of your esteem and regard, have not suffered your eye to prejudice you against it; a *faux pas* into which I have known ladies of very good understanding betrayed ere now, I assure you. Had there been a question last year

of our meeting at Olney, I should have felt myself particularly interested in this inattention of yours to the figure, for the sake of its contents; for at that time I had rather more body than it became a man who pretends to public approbation as a poet, to carry about him. But, thanks to Dr. Kerr, I do not at present measure an inch more in the girth than is perfectly consistent with the highest pretensions in that way. Apollo himself is hardly less chargeable with prominence about the waist than I am.

I by no means insist upon making ladies of the Trojan women, unless I can reconcile you to the term. But I must observe in the first place, that though in our language the word be of modern use, it is likewise very ancient. We read in our oldest Bibles of the elect *Lady*, and of Babylon the *Lady* of kingdoms. In the next place, the Grecians, Homer at least, when a woman of rank is accosted, takes care in many instances that she shall be addressed in a style suited to her condition, for which purpose he employs a word more magnificent in its amount than even lady, and which literally signifies very little less than goddess. The word that I mean—that I may make it legible to you, is *Daimonie*. There were, no doubt, in Troy,—but I will say no more of it. I have that to write about to my English lady, that makes all the ladies of antiquity nothing worth to me.

We are this moment returned from the house¹ above mentioned. The parlour is small and neat, not a mere cupboard, but very passable: the chamber is better, and quite smart. There is a

¹ Etolia House, Bridge Street, Olney.

little room close to your own for Mrs. Eaton, and there is room for Cooke and Samuel. The terms are half a guinea a week; but it seems as if we were never to take a step without a stumble. The kitchen is bad,—it has, indeed, never been used except as a washhouse; for people at Olney do not eat and drink as they do in other places. I do not mean, my dear, that they quaff nectar or feed on ambrosia, but *tout au contraire*. So what must be done about this abominable kitchen? It is out of doors: that is not amiss. It has neither range nor jack: that is terrible. But then range and jack are not unattainables; they may be easily supplied. And if it were not—abominable kitchen that it is, no bigger than half an egg-shell, shift might be made. The good woman is content that your servants should eat and drink in her parlour, but expects that they shall disperse themselves when they have done. But whither, who can say? unless into the arbour in the garden, for that they should solace themselves in said kitchen were hardly to be expected. While I write this, Mrs. U. is gone to attempt a treaty with the linendraper over the way, which, if she succeeds, will be best of all, because the rooms are better, and it is just at hand. I must halt till she returns.—She returns;—nothing done. She is gone again to another place. Once more I halt. Again she returns and opens the parlour door with these tidings:—‘I have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes. I went to Maurice Smith’s’ (he, you must know, my dear, is a Jack-of-all-trades); ‘I said, do you know if Mr. Brightman¹ could and would let lodgings ready furnished

¹ Currier. Lived at Dagnell Manor, Olney.

to a lady with three servants?' Maurice's wife calls out (she is a Quaker), 'Why dost thee not take the vicarage?' I replied, There is no furniture. 'Pshaw!' quoth Maurice's wife; 'we will furnish it for thee, and at the lowest rate; from a bed to a platter we will find all.'—And what do you intend now? said I to Mrs. Unwin. 'Why now,' quoth she, 'I am going to the curate to hear what *he* says.' So away she goes, and in about twenty minutes returns.—'Well, now it is all settled. Lady H. is to have all the vicarage, except two rooms, at the rate of ten guineas a year; and Maurice will furnish it for five guineas from June to November, inclusive.' So, my dear, you and your train are provided for to my heart's content. They are Lady Austen's lodgings, only with more room, and at the same price. You have a parlour sixteen feet by fourteen, chamber ditto; a room for your own maid, near to your own, that I have occupied many a good time; an exceeding good garret for Cooke, and another ditto, at a convenient distance, for Samuel; a cellar, a good kitchen, the use of the garden;—in short, all that you can want. Give us our commission in your next, and all shall be ready by the first of June. You will observe, my beloved cousin, that it is not in all above eight shillings a week in the whole year, or but a trifle more. And the furniture is really smart, and the beds good. But you must find your own linen. Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined that, whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be *Vicar* of Olney. Come and cheer my heart. I have left many things unsaid, but shall note them another time.—Adieu!

Ever yours,

W. C.

I am so charmed with the subject that concludes my letter that I grudge every inch of paper to any other. Yet must I allow myself space to say that Lord Dartmouth's behaviour to you at the concert has won my heart to him more than ever. It was such a well-timed kindness to me, and so evidently performed with an equal design of giving pleasure to you, that I love him for it at my heart. I have never, indeed, at any time, had occasion to charge him, as I know that many have done, with want of warmth in his friendship.—I honour you, my dear, for your constellation of nobles. I rejoice that the contents of my box have pleased you: may I never write any thing that does not! My friend Bull brought me to-day the last *Gentleman's Magazine*. There your cousin is held up again. Oh rare coz.!

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, April 17, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest cousin, I will. He says, and as beautiful as truly—‘Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!’ I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden,

but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour, nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door opening out of our garden affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the roundabout by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber-windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge,¹ described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance. Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain, for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter; but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs. Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces; but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelvemonth! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much

¹

—‘Yonder bridge

That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood.’—*Task* iv.

beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous, apprising me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions, lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort, or to steal the secret from

you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Bethshemites, for looking into the ark, which they were not allowed to touch.

I have not sent for Kerr, for Kerr can do nothing but send me to Bath, and to Bath I cannot go for a thousand reasons. The summer will set me up again. I grow fat every day, and shall be as big as Gog or Magog, or both put together, before you come.

I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor; that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning till night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so? I am pleased with Lord Thurlow's inquiries about me. If he takes it into that inimitable head of his, he may make a man of me yet. I could love him heartily, if he would but deserve it at my hands. That I did so once is certain. The Duchess of —, who in the world set her a-going? But if all the duchesses in the world were spinning, like so many whirligigs, for my benefit, I would not stop them. It is a noble thing to be a poet, it makes all the world so lively. I might have preached more sermons than even Tillotson did, and better, and the world would have been still fast asleep; but a volume of verse is a fiddle that puts the universe in motion.—Yours,
my dear friend and cousin,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, April 24, 1786.

YOUR letters are so much my comfort, that I often tremble lest by any accident I should be disappointed ; and the more because you have been, more than once, so engaged in company on the writing day, that I have had a narrow escape. Let me give you a piece of good counsel, my cousin : follow my laudable example,—write when you can ; take Time's forelock in one hand, and a pen in the other, and so make sure of your opportunity. It is well for me that you write faster than anybody, and more in an hour than other people in two, else I know not what would become of me. When I read your letters I hear you talk, and I love talking letters dearly, especially from you. Well ! the middle of June will not be always a thousand years off, and when it comes I shall hear you, and see you too, and shall not care a farthing then if you do not touch a pen in a month. By the way, you must either send me, or bring me some more paper, for before the moon shall have performed a few more revolutions I shall not have a scrap left,—and tedious revolutions they are just now, that is certain.

I give you leave to be as peremptory as you please, especially at a distance ; but when you say that you are a Cowper (and the better it is for the Cowpers that such you are, and I give them joy of you, with all my heart), you must not forget that I boast myself a Cowper too, and have my humours, and fancies, and purposes, and determinations, as

well as others of my name, and hold them as fast as they can. *You*, indeed, tell *me* how often I shall see you when you come! A pretty story truly. I am a *he* Cowper, my dear, and claim the privileges that belong to my noble sex. But these matters shall be settled, as my cousin Agamemnon used to say, at a more convenient time.

I shall rejoice to see the letter you promise me, for though I met with a morsel of praise last week, I do not know that the week current is likely to produce me any, and having lately been pretty much pampered with that diet, I expect to find myself rather hungry by the time when your next letter shall arrive. It will therefore be very opportune. The morsel, above alluded to, came from—whom do you think? From Miss Hill,¹ but she desires that her authorship may be a secret. And in my answer I promised not to divulge it except to you. It is a pretty copy of verses, neatly written, and well turned, and when you come you shall see them. I intend to keep all pretty things to myself till then, that they may serve me as a bait to lure you hither more effectually. The last letter that I had from—— I received so many years since, that it seems as if it had reached me a good while before I was born.

I was grieved at the heart that the General could not come, and that illness was in part the cause that hindered him. I have sent him, by his express desire, a new edition of the first book, and half the second. He would not suffer me to send it to you, my dear, lest you should post it away to Maty at once. He did not give that reason, but, being shrewd, I found it.

¹ Fanny Hill, Mr. Joseph Hill's sister.

The grass begins to grow, and the leaves to bud, and every thing is preparing to be beautiful against you come. Adieu! W. C.

You inquire of our walks, I perceive, as well as of our rides: they are beautiful. You inquire also concerning a cellar: you have two cellars. Oh! what years have passed since we took the same walks, and drank out of the same bottle! but a few more weeks, and then!

TO LADY HESKETH

May 1, 1786.

You need not trouble yourself, my dearest cousin, about paper, my kind and good friend the General having undertaken of his own mere motion to send me all that I ever want, whether for transcript or correspondence. My dear, there is no possible project within the compass of invention, by which you can be released from the necessity of keeping your own nags at Olney, if you keep your carriage here. At the Swan¹ they have no horses, or, which is equally negative in such a case, they have but one. At the Bull, indeed, they keep a chaise; but, not to mention the disagreeable of using one inn and hiring from another, or the extortionate demands that the woman of the Bull ever makes when anything either gentle or noble is so unhappy as to fall into her hands, her steeds are so seldom disengaged, that you would find the disappointments endless. The chaise, of course, is engaged equally, and the town of Olney affords nothing else into

¹ An inn on the market-place. It had a wooden balcony.

which you could put your person. All these matters taken together, and another reason with them, which I shall presently subjoin—it appeared to us so indispensable a requisite to your comfort here that you should have your own, both carriage and horses, that we have this day actually engaged accommodation for them at the Swan aforesaid.

Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful; but it is a walk to get at them; and though when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, I doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off, and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year, when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said, ‘Oh!—that our garden opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time enough to enjoy them.’ Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo* stares you in the face. Would I could do so too just at this moment!—We have three or four other walks, which are all pleasant in their way; but, except one, they all lie at such a distance as you would find heinously incommodious. But Weston, as I said before, is our favourite: of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it

has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was, indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field,¹ one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise: but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses² on this melancholy occasion, which, though they have been printed, I dare say you never saw. When you come, therefore, you shall see them; but, as I told you in my last, not before. No, my dear, not a moment sooner; and for the reason in my last given I shall disobey your mandate with respect to those of F. Hill:³ and for another reason also: if I copy them, they will occupy all the rest of my paper, which I cannot spare; and if I enclose the original, I must send my packet to Palace Yard, and you finding that the postman passed your door without dropping a letter from me would conclude that I had neglected to write; and I will not incur such a suspicion in your mind for a moment.

On Saturday,—for sooner than Saturday, we could not, on account of the weather,—we paid our visit at Weston, and a very agreeable visit we found it. We encountered there, besides the family, four ladies, all strange to us. One of them was a Miss Bagot, a sister of my friend Walter's; and another of them was a Mrs. Chester, his sister-in-

¹ Lynch Close, near Lavendon Mill (a flour mill).

² 'The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade.'

³ Fanny Hill. See letter of April 24, 1786.

law. Mr. Chester, his brother, lives at Chicheley, about four miles from Olney. Poor Mrs. Bagot was remembered with tears by Mrs. Chester: she is by every body's account of her a most amiable woman. Such also, I dare say, is Miss Bagot; but the room in which we were received was large, and she sitting at the side of it, exactly opposite to me, I had neither lungs nor courage to halloo at her; therefore nothing passed between us. I chatted a good deal with my neighbours; but you know, my dear, I am not famous for vociferation where there are ears not much accustomed to my voice. Nothing can be more obliging than the behaviour of the Throckmortons has ever been to us: they long since gave us the keys of all their retreats, even of their kitchen-garden. And that you may not suspect your cousin of being any other than a very obliging creature too, I will give you a stroke of his politesse. When they were here they desired to see the garden and greenhouse. I am proud of neither, except in poetry, because there I can fib without lying, and represent them better than they are. However, I conducted them to the sight, and having set each of the ladies with her head in a bush of myrtle, I took out my scissors and cut a bouquet for each of them. When we were with *them* Mrs. Throckmorton told me that she had put all the slips into water, for she should be so glad to make them grow, and asked me if they would strike root. I replied, that I had known such things happen, but believed that they were very rare, and recommended a hot-bed rather, and she immediately resolved that they should have one. Now comes the period at which your cousin shines. In the

evening I ordered my labourer to trundle up a wheel-barrow of myrtles and canary lavender (a most fragrant plant) to Weston, with which I sent a note to Mrs. Throckmorton, recommending them to her protection. *Dites moi, ma chère, ne suis-je homme tout à fait poli ?*

Weston, as I told you, is about a mile off, but in truth it is rather more. Gayhurst is five miles off: I have walked there, but I never walked thither. I have not these many years been such an extravagant tramper as I once was. I did myself no good I believe by pilgrimages of such immoderate length. The Chesters, the Throckmortons, the Wrightes, are all of them good-natured agreeable people, and I rejoice, for your sake, that they lie all within your beat. Of the rest of our neighbours I know nothing. They are not, indeed, many. A Mr. Praed lives at a seat called Tyingham, which is also about five miles hence; but him I never saw, save once, when I saw him jump over a rail at Weston. There is a Mr. Towers at a place called Astwoodberry, about seven miles off; but he is a foxhunter merely: and Lord Egmont dwelt in a hired house at a place called Woollaston, at the same distance; but he hired it merely by way of kennel to hold him during the hunting season, and by this time, I suppose, has left it.

The copper is going to work for you again. Fifty gallons of good beer, added to seventy, will serve to moisten your maidens' lips, and the throats of your lacqueys and your coachees, till the season for brewing returns, for it does not succeed in warm weather.

Mrs. Unwin sends you her affections; and the

words that follow I take from her mouth as she delivers them : ‘ Tell Lady Hesketh that I have the sincerest complacency in the expectation of her ; and in observing how all things concur and coincide that can bid fair to make her stay at Olney agreeable, insomuch that she seems only to wave her pen and the thing she wants springs up in an instant.’ May Heaven bless you, my ever dear, dear cousin. Farewell. Yours,

WM. COWPER.

I have heard that Dr. Maty has criticised my specimen with asperity. Is there any truth in this, and how much ? or is there none ? It has vexed me.—I have a fine passion-tree in a green tub, that I destine to your parlour chimney : it will be full of flowers.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 8, 1786.

I DID not at all doubt that your tenderness for my feelings had inclined you to suppress in your letters to me the intelligence concerning Maty’s critique, that yet reached me from another quarter. When I wrote to you I had not learned it from the General, but from my friend Bull, who only knew it by hearsay. The next post brought me the news of it from the first-mentioned, and the critique itself enclosed. Together with it came also a squib discharged against me in the *Public Advertiser*. The General’s letter found me in one of my most melancholy moods, and my spirits did not rise on the receipt of it. The letter indeed that he had cut from the newspaper gave me little pain, both because

it contained nothing formidable, though written with malevolence enough, and because a nameless author can have no more weight with his readers than the reason which he has on his side can give him. But Maty's animadversions hurt me more. In part they appeared to me unjust, and in part ill-natured; and yet the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself. For I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted,—the world has one already. But I will not fill my letter to you with hypercriticisms; I will only add an extract from a letter of Colman's, that I received last Friday, and will then dismiss the subject. It came accompanied by a copy of the specimen, which he himself had amended, and with so much taste and candour that it charmed me. He says as follows:

‘ One copy I have returned, with some remarks prompted by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence. I know no other way at once so plain, and so short, of delivering my thoughts on the specimen of your translation, which on the whole I admire exceedingly, thinking it breathes the spirit, and conveys the manner of the original; though having here neither Homer, nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets, and the jingle of rhyme. . . . ’

His amendments are chiefly bestowed on the lines encumbered with elisions, and I will just take this opportunity to tell you, my dear, because I know you to be as much interested in what I write as myself, that some of the most offensive of those elisions were occasioned by mere criticism. I was fairly hunted into them, by vexatious objections made without end by —, and his friend, and altered, till at last I did not care how I altered. Many thanks for —'s verses, which deserve just the character you give of them. They are neat and easy,—but I would mumble her well, if I could get at her, for allowing herself to suppose for a moment that I praised the Chancellor with a view to emolument. I wrote those stanzas merely for my own amusement, and they slept in a dark closet years after I composed them; not in the least designed for publication. But when Johnson had printed off the longer pieces, of which the first volume principally consists, he wrote me word that he wanted yet two thousand lines to swell it to a proper size. On that occasion it was that I collected every scrap of verse that I could find, and that among the rest. None of the smaller poems had been introduced, or had been published at all with my name, but for this necessity.

Just as I wrote the last word I was called down to Dr. Kerr, who came to pay me a voluntary visit. Were I sick, his cheerful and friendly manner would almost restore me. Air and exercise are his theme; them he recommends as the best physic for me, and in all weathers. Come, therefore, my dear, and take a little of this good physic with me, for you will find it beneficial as well as I: come and assist

Mrs. Unwin in the re-establishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over your head, comfortable apartments, obliging neighbours, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you dearly, and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself, if my fits of dejection seize me; and as often as they do, you will be grieved for me; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under heaven, from whose co-operations with Mrs. Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive; but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life.

Of how much importance is an author to himself! I return to that abominable specimen again, just to notice Maty's impatient censure of the repetition that you mention: I mean of the word *hand*. In the original there is not a repetition of it. But to repeat a word in that manner, and on such an occasion, is by no means what he calls it, a *modern* invention. In Homer I could show him many such, and in Virgil they abound. Colman, who, in his judgment of classical matters, is inferior to none, says, 'I know not why Maty objects to this expression.' I could easily change it. But the case standing thus, I know not whether my proud stomach will condescend so low. I rather feel myself disinclined to it.

One evening last week Mrs. Unwin and I took our walk to Weston, and as we were returning through the grove opposite to the house, the Throckmortons presented themselves at the door. They are owners of a house at Weston, at present empty. It is a very good one, infinitely superior to ours. When we drank chocolate with them, they both expressed their ardent desire that we would take it, wishing to have us for nearer neighbours. If you, my cousin, were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered up all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever without danger of ejection; whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter. A most unfortunate mistake was made by that gentleman's bailiff in his absence. Just before he left Weston last year for the winter, he gave him orders to cut short the tops of the flowering shrubs that lined a serpentine walk in a delightful grove, celebrated by my poetship in a little piece that you remember was called the 'Shrubbery.' The dunce, misapprehending the order, cut down and faggoted up the whole grove, leaving neither tree, bush, nor twig,—nothing but stumps about as high as my ankle. Mrs. Throckmorton told us that she never saw her husband so angry in her life. I judge indeed by his physiognomy, which has great sweetness in it, that he is very little addicted to that infernal passion.

But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him.

I felt myself really concerned for the Chancellor's illness, and from what I learned of it, both from the papers, and from General Cowper, concluded that he must die. I am accordingly delighted in the same proportion with the news of his recovery. May he live, and live to be still the support of Government! If it shall be his good pleasure to render me personally any material service, I have no objection to it. But Heaven knows, that it is impossible for any living wight to bestow less thought on that subject than myself.—May God be ever with you, my beloved cousin!

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 15, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—From this very morning I begin to date the last month of our long separation, and confidently and most comfortably hope that before the fifteenth of June shall present itself we shall have seen each other. Is it not so? And will it not be one of the most extraordinary eras of my extraordinary life? A year ago, we neither corresponded, nor expected to meet in this world. But this world is a scene of marvellous events, many of them more marvellous than fiction itself would dare to hazard; and, blessed be God! they are not all of the distressing kind. Now and then in the course of an existence, whose hue is for the most part sable, a day turns up that makes amends for many sighs, and many subjects of complaint. Such

a day shall I account the day of your arrival at Olney.

Wherefore is it (canst thou tell me?) that together with all those delightful sensations, to which the sight of a long absent dear friend gives birth, there is a mixture of something painful; flutterings, and tumults, and I know not what accompaniments of our pleasure, that are in fact perfectly foreign from the occasion? Such I feel when I think of our meeting; and such I suppose feel you; and the nearer the crisis approaches, the more I am sensible of them. I know beforehand that they will increase with every turn of the wheels that shall convey me to Newport, when I shall set out to meet you; and that when we actually meet, the pleasure, and this unaccountable pain together, will be as much as I shall be able to support. I am utterly at a loss for the cause, and can only resolve it into that appointment, by which it has been foreordained that all human delights shall be qualified and mingled with their contraries. For there is nothing formidable in you. To me at least there is nothing such, no, not even in your menaces, unless when you threaten me to write no more. Nay, I verily believe, did I not know you to be what you are, and had less affection for you than I have, I should have fewer of these emotions, of which I would have none, if I could help it. But a fig for them all! Let us resolve to combat with, and to conquer them. They are dreams: they are illusions of the judgment. Some enemy that hates the happiness of human kind, and is ever industrious to dash it, works them in us; and their being so perfectly unreasonable as they are is a proof of it. Nothing that is such can be the

work of a good agent. This I know too by experience, that, like all other illusions, they exist only by force of imagination, are indebted for their prevalence to the absence of their object, and in a few moments after its appearance cease. So, then, this is a settled point, and the case stands thus. You will tremble as you draw near to Newport, and so shall I: but we will both recollect that there is no reason why we should, and this recollection will at least have some little effect in our favour. We will likewise both take the comfort of what we know to be true, that the tumult will soon cease, and the pleasure long survive the pain, even as long I trust as we ourselves shall survive it.

What you say of Maty gives me all the consolation that you intended. We both think it highly probable that you suggest the true cause of his displeasure, when you suppose him mortified at not having had a part of the translation laid before him, ere the specimen was published. The General was very much hurt, and calls his censure harsh and unreasonable. He likewise sent me a consolatory letter on the occasion, in which he took the kindest pains to heal the wound that he supposed I might have suffered. I am not naturally insensible, and the sensibilities that I had by nature have been wonderfully enhanced by a long series of shocks, given to a frame of nerves that was never very athletic. I feel accordingly, whether painful or pleasant, in the extreme; am easily elevated, and easily cast down. The frown of a critic freezes my poetical powers, and discourages me to a degree that makes me ashamed of my own weakness. Yet I presently recover my confidence again. The half

of what you so kindly say in your last would at any time restore my spirits, and, being said by you, is infallible. I am not ashamed to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. I have (what, perhaps, you little suspect me of) in my nature an infinite share of ambition. But with it I have at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured, too, in the only path that at so late a period was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way through the obscurity, that has been so long my portion, into notice. Every thing therefore that seems to threaten this my favourite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me: but you will not; and they I think would blame without just cause. We certainly do not honour God when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent He may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never-failing truth, that to him who *hath* (that is, to him who occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it), more

shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymer, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself.

I rejoice to hear that Mr. Throckmorton wishes to be on a more intimate footing. I am shy, and suspect that he is not very much otherwise; and the consequence has been that we have mutually wished an acquaintance without being able to accomplish it. Blessings on you for the hint that you dropped on the subject of the house at Weston! For the burthen of my song is,—‘Since we have met once again, let us never be separated, as we have been, more.’ W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Olney, May 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—About three weeks since I met your sister Chester at Mr. Throckmorton’s, and from her learned that you are at Blithfield, and in health. Upon the encouragement of this information it is that I write now; I should not otherwise have known with certainty where to find you, or have been equally free from the fear of unseasonable intrusion. May God be with you, my friend, and give you a just measure of submission to His will, the most effectual of all remedies for the evils of this changing scene. I doubt not that He has granted you this blessing already, and may He still continue it!

Now I will talk a little about myself: for except myself, living in this *terrarum angulo*, what can I

have to talk about? In a scene of perfect tranquillity, and the profoundest silence, I am kicking up the dust of heroic narrative, and besieging Troy again. I told you that I had almost finished the translation of the *Iliad*, and I verily thought so;—but I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached the end of the poem, the first book of my version was a twelvemonth old. When I came to consider it, after having laid it by so long, it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so. But still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice to publish 'nothing in haste; so much advantage have I derived from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once. He indeed recommends nine years' imprisonment of your verses before you send them abroad: but the ninth part of that time is I believe as much as there is need of to open a man's eyes upon his own defects, and to secure him from the danger of premature self-approbation. Neither ought it to be forgotten that nine years make so wide an interval between the cup and the lip, that a thousand things may fall out between. New engagements may occur, which may make the finishing of that which a poet has begun impossible. In nine years he may rise into a situation, or he may sink into one utterly incompatible with his purpose. His constitution may break in nine years, and sickness may disqualify him for improving what he enterprised in the days of health. His inclination

may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, no where admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it: I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these to myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and hunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies teased me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume.

Your brother Chester has furnished me with Barnes's Homer,¹ from whose notes I collect here and there some useful information, and whose fair and legible type preserves me from the danger of being as blind as was my author. I saw a sister of yours at Mr. Throckmorton's; but I am not

¹ Joshua Barnes (1654-1712), Greek scholar and antiquary. His edition of Homer was published in 1710. Bentley used to say of him that he 'knew as much Greek as a Greek cobbler.'

good at making myself heard across a large room, and therefore nothing passed between us. I felt, however, that she was my friend's sister, and much esteemed her for your sake. Ever yours,

W. C.

P.S. The swan is called *argutus* (I suppose) *a non arguendo*, and *canorus a non canendo*. But whether he be dumb or vocal, more poetical than the eagle or less, it is no matter. A feather of either, in token of your approbation and esteem, will never, you may rest assured, be an offence to me.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Olney, May 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Within this hour arrived three sets of your new publication,¹ for which we sincerely thank you. We have breakfasted since they came, and consequently, as you may suppose, have neither of us had yet an opportunity to make ourselves acquainted with the contents. I shall be happy (and when I say that, I mean to be understood in the fullest and most emphatical sense of the word) if my frame of mind shall be such as may permit me to study them. But Adam's approach to the tree of life, after he had sinned, was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword that turned every way, than mine to its great Antitype has been now almost these thirteen years, a short interval of three or four days, which passed about this time twelvemonth, alone excepted. For what reason it is that I am thus excluded, if I am ever

¹ *Messiah.*

again to be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this : that if He is still my Father, this paternal severity has toward me been such as that I have reason to account unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them, that, as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it ; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter as those were which Paul heard and saw in the third heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand, on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended. In such a situation of mind encompassed by the midnight of absolute despair, and a thousand times filled with unspeakable horror, I first commenced an author. Distress drove me to it, and the impossibility of subsisting without some employment still recommends it. I am not, indeed, so perfectly hopeless as I was ; but I am equally in need of an occupation, being often as much, and sometimes even more, worried than ever. I cannot amuse myself as I once could, with carpenters' or with gardeners' tools, or with squirrels and guinea-pigs. At that time I was a child. But since it has pleased God, whatever else He withholds, to restore to me a

man's mind, I have put away childish things. Thus far, therefore, it is plain that I have not chosen or prescribed to myself my own way, but have been providentially led to it; perhaps I might say with equal propriety, compelled and scourged into it; for, certainly, could I have made my choice, or were I permitted to make it even now, those hours which I spend in poetry I would spend with God. But it is evidently His will that I should spend them as I do, because every other way of employing them He Himself continues to make impossible. If, in the course of such an occupation, or by inevitable consequence of it, either my former connections are revived or new ones occur, these things are as much a part of the dispensation as the leading points of it themselves; the effect as much as the cause. If His purposes in thus directing me are gracious, He will take care to prove them such in the issue, and in the mean time will preserve me (for He is able to do that in one condition of life as in another) from all mistakes in conduct that might prove pernicious to myself, or give reasonable offence to others. I can say it as truly as it was ever spoken: Here I am: let Him do with me as seemeth Him good. At present, however, I have no connections at which either you, I trust, or any who love me, and wish me well, have occasion to conceive alarm. Much kindness I have experienced at the hands of several, some of them near relations, others not related to me at all; but I do not know that there is among them a single person from whom I am likely to catch contamination. I can say of them all with more truth than Jacob uttered when he called kid venison, 'The Lord thy God brought them unto me.' I

could show you among them two men¹ whose lives, though they have but little of what we call evangelical light, are ornaments to a Christian country; men who fear God more than some who even profess to love Him. But I will not particularise farther on such a subject.

Be they what they may, our situations are so distant, and we are likely to meet so seldom, that were they, as they are not, persons of even exceptionable manners, their manners would have little to do with me. We correspond at present only on the subject of what passed at Troy three thousand years ago; and they are matters that, if they can do no good, will at least hurt nobody. Your friendship for me, and the proof that I see of it in your friendly concern for my welfare on this occasion, demanded that I should be explicit. Assure yourself that I love and honour you, as upon all accounts, so especially for the interest that you take and have ever taken in my welfare. Most sincerely I wish you all happiness in your new abode,² all possible success in your ministry, and much fruit of your newly-published labours; and am, with love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, most affectionately yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 25, 1786.

I HAVE at length, my cousin, found my way into my summer abode.³ I believe that I described it to

¹ The brothers Throckmorton, who were Roman Catholics.

² Newton had just moved from Charles Square, Hoxton, to No. 6 Coleman Street.

³ The summer-house.

you some time since, and will therefore now leave it undescribed. I will only say that I am writing in a bandbox, situated, at least in my account, delightfully, because it has a window in one side that opens into that orchard, through which, as I am sitting here, I shall see you often pass, and which, therefore, I already prefer to all the orchards in the world. You do well to prepare me for all possible delays, because in this life all sorts of disappointments are possible, and I shall do well, if any such delay of your journey should happen, to practise that lesson of patience which you inculcate. But it is a lesson which, even with you for my teacher, I shall be slow to learn. Being sure, however, that you will not procrastinate without cause, I will make myself as easy as I can about it, and hope the best. To convince you how much I am under discipline and good advice, I will lay aside a favourite measure, influenced in doing so by nothing but the good sense of your contrary opinion. I had set my heart on meeting you at Newport. In my haste to see you once again, I was willing to overlook many awkwardnesses I could not but foresee would attend it. I put them aside so long as I only foresaw them myself, but since I find that you foresee them too, I can no longer deal so slightly with them. It is therefore determined that we meet at Olney. Much I shall feel, but I will not die if I can help it, and I beg that you will take all possible care to outlive it likewise, for I know what it is to be balked in the moment of acquisition, and should be loth to know it again.

Last Monday, in the evening, we walked to Weston, according to our usual custom. It

happened, owing to a mistake of time, that we set out half an hour sooner than usual. This mistake we discovered, while we were in the wilderness. So, finding that we had time before us, as they say, Mrs. Unwin proposed that we should go into the village, and take a view of the house that I had just mentioned to you. We did so, and found it such a one as in most respects would suit you well. But Moses Brown, our vicar, who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer, and for aught that appears so he may; in which case, for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me, that no other place can rival. But this, and a thousand things more, shall be talked over when you come.

We have been industriously cultivating our acquaintance with our Weston neighbours since I wrote last, and they on their part have been equally diligent in the same cause. I have a notion, that we shall all suit well. I see much in them both that I admire. You know, perhaps, that they are Catholics.

It is a delightful bundle of praise, my cousin, that you have sent me;—all jasmine and lavender. Whoever the lady is, she has evidently an admirable pen, and a cultivated mind. If a person reads, it is no matter in what language; and if the mind be informed, it is no matter whether that mind belongs to a man or a woman: the taste and the judgment will receive the benefit alike in both. Long before *The Task* was published, I made an experiment one day, being in a frolicksome mood,

upon my friend :—we were walking in the garden, and conversing on a subject similar to these lines,—

‘ The few that pray at all, pray oft amiss,
And, seeking grace to improve the present good,
Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.’¹

I repeated them, and said to him with an air of nonchalance, ‘ Do you recollect those lines ? I have seen them somewhere ; where are they ? ’ He put on a considering face, and after some deliberation replied,—‘ Oh, I will tell you where they must be ;—in the *Night Thoughts*. ’ I was glad my trial turned out so well, and did not undeceive him. I mention this occurrence only in confirmation of the letter-writer’s opinion ; but at the same time I do assure you, on the faith of an honest man, that I never in my life designed an imitation of Young, or of any other writer ; for mimicry is my abhorrence,—at least in poetry.

Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines ; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect, of the most advantageous kind, upon them. You must not imagine, neither, that I am on the whole in any great degree subject to nervous affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these

¹ *The Task*, vi. 54, slightly misquoted.

many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me;—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

Adieu, my beloved cousin! God grant that our friendship which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever!

For you must know that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom, in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be,—Yours for ever, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, May 29, 1786.

THOU dear, comfortable cousin, whose letters, among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find any thing in them that does not give me

pleasure; for which therefore I would take nothing in exchange that the world could give me, save and except that for which I must exchange them soon (and happy shall I be to do so), your own company. That, indeed, is delayed a little too long; to my impatience at least it seems so, who find the spring, backward as it is, too forward, because many of its beauties will have faded before you will have an opportunity to see them. We took our customary walk yesterday in the wilderness at Weston, and saw, with regret, the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some of them blown, and others just upon the point of blowing, and could not help observing—all these will be gone before Lady Hesketh comes! Still, however, there will be roses, and jasmine, and honeysuckle, and shady walks, and cool alcoves, and you will partake them with us. But I want you to have a share of every thing that is delightful here, and cannot bear that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before you can come to enjoy it.

Every day I think of you, and almost all the day long; I will venture to say, that even *you* were never so expected in your life. I called last week at the Quaker's to see the furniture of your bed, the fame of which had reached me. It is, I assure you, superb, of printed cotton, and the subject classical. Every morning you will open your eyes on Phaeton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot for a day. May your sleep be as sound as your bed will be sumptuous, and your nights at least will be well provided for.

I shall send up the sixth and seventh books of the *Iliad* shortly, and shall address them to you. You will forward them to the General. I long to show you my workshop,¹ and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as two wax figures in an old-fashioned picture frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer-time. I rose an hour sooner than usual this morning, that I might finish my sheet before breakfast, for I must write this day to the General.

The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dewdrops, and the birds are singing in the apple trees, among the blossoms. Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his Muse.

I have made your heart ache too often, my poor, dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect that I treat you with reserve; there is nothing in which I am concerned that you shall not be made acquainted with. But the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am indeed even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself not

¹ The Summer-house.

only pleasure, but peace of mind,—at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me; but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney may perhaps make it an abiding one. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Olney, June 4 and 5, 1786.

AN! my cousin, you begin already to fear and quake. What a hero am I, compared with you! I have no fears of *you*; on the contrary am as bold as a lion. I wish that your carriage were even now at the door. You should soon see with how much courage I would face you. But what cause have you for fear? Am I not your cousin, with whom you have wandered in the fields of Freemantle,¹ and at Bevis's Mount?² who used to read to you, laugh with you, till our sides have ached, at any thing, or nothing? And am I in these respects at all altered? You will not find me so; but just as ready to laugh, and to wander, as you ever knew me. A cloud perhaps may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted. And are not you the identical cousin with whom I have performed all these feats? The very Harriet whom I saw, for the first time, at Dr. Grey's,³ in Norfolk Street? (It was on a Sunday, when you came with my uncle and aunt to drink tea there, and I had dined there, and was just going back to West-

¹ Village on Southampton Water, now a suburb of Southampton. Cowper, when a young man, visited at Freemantle Hall.

² A villa near Southampton.

³ Richard Grey, D.D. (1694-1771), was a friend of Dr. Johnson and of Doddridge. He wrote *Memoria Technica* in 1730.

minster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows: that I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt not that I shall delight even to my latest hour. But this wicked coachmaker has sunk my spirits. What a miserable thing it is to depend, in any degree, for the accomplishment of a wish, and that wish so fervent, on the punctuality of a creature who, I suppose, was never punctual in his life! Do tell him, my dear, in order to quicken him, that if he performs his promise, he shall make my coach when I want one, and that if he performs it not, I will most assuredly employ some other man.

The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner; we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain,¹ and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper, therefore all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject,—their own religion. I happened to say that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times no doubt to the hazard of a patient's

¹ Dr. Gregson—Cowper's 'Griggy.'

life, through the ignorance of an apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton assented to what I said, and turning to his chaplain, to my infinite surprise observed to him, 'That is just as absurd as our praying in Latin.' I could have hugged him for his liberality, and freedom from bigotry, but thought it rather more decent to let the matter pass without any visible notice. I therefore heard it with pleasure, and kept my pleasure to myself. The two ladies in the meantime were *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room. Their conversation turned principally (as I afterwards learned from Mrs. Unwin) on a most delightful topic, viz. myself. In the first place, Mrs. Throckmorton admired my book, from which she quoted by heart more than I could repeat, though I so lately wrote it.

In short, my dear, I cannot proceed to relate what she said of the book, and the book's author, for that abominable modesty that I cannot even yet get rid of. Let it suffice to say that you, who are disposed to love every body who speaks kindly of your cousin, will certainly love Mrs. Throckmorton, when you shall be told what she said of him; and that you *will* be told is equally certain, because it depends on Mrs. Unwin, who will tell you many a good long story for me, that I am not able to tell for myself. I am, however, not at all in arrear to our neighbours in the matter of admiration and esteem, but the more I know them, the more I like them, and have nearly an affection for them both. I am delighted that *The Task* has so large a share of the approbation of your sensible Suffolk friend.

I received yesterday from the General another

letter of T. S. An unknown auxiliary having started up in my behalf, I believe I shall leave the business of answering to him, having no leisure myself for controversy. He lies very open to a very effectual reply.

My dearest cousin, adieu! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh! this coachmaker, and oh! this holiday week!—Yours, with impatient desire to see you, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Olney, June 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The little time that I can devote to any other purpose than that of poetry is, as you may suppose, stolen. Homer is urgent. Much is done, but much remains undone, and no schoolboy is more attentive to the performance of his daily task than I am. You will therefore excuse me if at present I am both unfrequent and short.

The paper tells me that the Chancellor has relapsed, and I am truly sorry to hear it. The first attack was dangerous, but a second must be more formidable still. It is not probable that I should ever hear from him again if he survive; yet of the much that I should have felt for him, had our connection never been interrupted, I still feel much. Every body will feel the loss of a man whose abilities have made him of such general importance.

I correspond again with Colman, and upon the most friendly footing, and find in his instance, and in some others, that an intimate intercourse, which has been only casually suspended, not forfeited on

either side by outrage, is capable not only of revival, but improvement.

I had a letter some time since from your sister Fanny, that gave me great pleasure. Such notices from old friends are always pleasant, and of such pleasures I have received many lately. They refresh the remembrance of early days, and make me young again. The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer,—

‘To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.’

There never was any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet, and were it possible to introduce it into either *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, I should certainly steal it. I am now flushed with expectation of Lady Hesketh, who spends the summer with us. We hope to see her next week. We have found admirable lodgings both for her and her suite, and a Quaker in this town, still more admirable than they, who, as if he loved her as much as I do, furnishes them for her with real elegance.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

June 12, 1786.

I AM neither young nor superannuated, yet am I a child. When I had read your letter I grumbled:—not at you, my dearest cousin, for you are in no fault, but at the whole generation of coachmakers, as you may suppose, and at yours in particular. I

foresaw and foreknew that he would fail in his promise, and yet was disappointed; was, in truth, no more prepared for what I expected with so much reason, than if I had not at all expected it. I grumbled till we went to dinner, and at intervals till we had dined; and when dinner was over, with very little encouragement, I could actually have cried. And if I had, I should in truth have thought them tears as well bestowed as most that I have shed for many years. At first I numbered months, then weeks, then days, and was just beginning to number hours, and now I am thrown back to days again. My first speech was, after folding up your letter (for I will honestly tell you all), I am crazed with Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and St. Albans, and Totteridge, and Hadley. When is she to set out?—When is she to be here? Do tell me, for perhaps, you understand it better than I. ‘Why,’ says Mrs. Unwin (with much more composure in her air than properly belonged to her, for she also had her feelings on the occasion), ‘she sets out to-morrow se’nnight, and will be here on the Wednesday after.’ And who knows that? replied I; will the coachmaker be at all more punctual in repairing the old carriage, than in making the new one? For my part, I have no hope of seeing her this month; and if it be possible, I will not think of it, lest I should be again disappointed. And to say the truth, my dear, though hours have passed since thus I said, and I have had time for cooler consideration, the suspicion still sticks close to me, that more delays may happen. A philosopher would prepare himself for such an event, but I am no philosopher, at least when the comfort of seeing you

is in question. I believe in my heart that there have been just as many true philosophers upon earth, as there have been men that have had little or no feeling, and not one more. Swift truly says—

‘Indifference, clad in reason’s guise,
All want of fortitude supplies.’

When I wake in the night, I feel my spirits the lighter because you are coming. When I am not at Troy, I am either occupied in the recollection of a thousand passages of my past life, in which you were a partaker with me, or conversing about you with Mrs. Unwin. Thus my days and nights have been spent principally ever since you determined upon this journey, and especially, and almost without interruption from any other subject, since the time of your journey has seemed near at hand. While I despaired, as I did for many years, that I should ever see you more, I thought of you, indeed, and often, but with less solicitude. I used to say to myself, Providence has so ordered it, and it is my duty to submit. He has cast me at a distance from her, and from all whom I once knew. He did it, and not I; it is He who has chosen my situation for me. Have I not reason to be thankful that, since He designed me to pass a part of my life, and no inconsiderable one neither, in a state of the deepest melancholy, He appointed me a friend in Mrs. Unwin, who should share all my sorrows with me, and watch over me in my helpless condition, night and day? What, and where, had I been without her? Such considerations were sufficient to reconcile me at that time to perpetual separation even from you, because perpetual I supposed it must be,

and without remedy. But now every hour of your absence seems long, for this very natural reason, because the same Providence has given me a hope that you will be present with me soon. A good that seems at an immeasurable distance, and that we cannot hope to reach, has therefore the less influence on our affections. But the same good brought nearer, made to appear practicable, promised to our hopes, and almost in possession, engages all our faculties and desires. All this is according to the natural and necessary course of things in the human heart; and the philosophy that would interfere with it, is folly at least, if not frenzy. A throne has at present but little sensible attraction for me. And why? Perhaps only because I know that should I break my heart with wishes for a throne, I should never reach one. But did I know assuredly that I should put on a crown to-morrow, perhaps I too should feel ambition, and account the interposing night tedious. The sum of the whole matter, my dear, is this: that this villainous coachmaker has mortified me monstrously, and that I tremble lest he should do so again. From you I have no fears. I see in your letter, and all the way through it, what pains you take to assure me and give me comfort. I am and will be comforted for that very reason; and will wait still other ten days with all the patience that I can muster. You, I know, will be punctual if you can, and that at least is matter of real consolation.

I approve altogether, my cousin beloved, of your sending your goods to the wagon on Saturday, and cookee by the coach on Tuesday. She will be here perhaps by four in the afternoon, at the latest by

five, and will have quite time enough to find out all the cupboards and shelves in her department before you arrive. But I declare and protest that cookee shall sleep that night at our house, and get her breakfast here next morning. You will break her heart, child, if you send her into a strange house where she will find nothing that has life but the curate, who has not much neither. Servant he keeps none. A woman makes his bed, and after a fashion, as they say, dresses his dinner, and then leaves him to his lucubrations. I do therefore insist on it, and so does Mrs. Unwin, that cookee shall be our guest for that time ; and from this we will not depart. I tell thee besides, that I shall be more glad to see her, than ever I was in my life to see one whom I never saw before. Guess why, if you can.

You must number your miles fifty-six instead of fifty-four. The fifty-sixth mile ends but a few yards beyond the vicarage. Soon after you shall have entered Olney, you will find an opening on your right hand. It is a lane that leads to your dwelling. There your coach may stop and set down Mrs. Eaton ; when she has walked about forty yards she will spy a green gate and rails on her left hand ; and when she has opened the gate and reached the house-door, she will find herself at home. But we have another manœuvre to play off upon you, and in which we positively will not be opposed, or if we are, it shall be to no purpose. I have an honest fellow that works in my garden, his name is Kitchener,¹ and we call him Kitch for brevity. He is sober, and as trusty as the day. He has a

¹ William Kitchener.

smart blue coat, that when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the Swan at Newport, there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. For though the way from Newport hither is short, there are turnings that might puzzle your coachman; and he will be of use, too, in conducting you to our house, which otherwise you might not easily find, partly through the stupidity of those of whom you might inquire, and partly from its out-of-the-way situation. My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us. The first man, therefore, you shall see in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry Kitch! He will immediately answer, My Lady! and from that moment you are sure not to be lost.

Your house shall be as clean as scrubbing and dry-rubbing can make it, and in all respects fit to receive you. My friend the Quaker, in all that I have seen of his doings, has acquitted himself much to my satisfaction. Some little things, he says, will perhaps be missing at first, in such a multiplicity, but they shall be produced as soon as called for. Mrs. U. has bought you six ducks, and is fattening them for you. She has also rummaged up a coop that will hold six chickens, and designs to people it for you by the first opportunity; for these things are not to be got fit for

the table at Olney. Thus, my dear, are all things in the best train possible, and nothing remains but that you come and show yourself. Oh, that moment! Shall we not both enjoy it?—That we shall.

I have received an anonymous complimentary Pindaric Ode from a little poet who calls himself a schoolboy. I send you the first stanza by way of specimen. You shall see it all soon.

‘TO WM. COWPER, OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

ON HIS POEMS IN THE SECOND VOLUME

In what high strains, my Muse, wilt thou
Attempt great Cowper's worth to show?

Pindaric strains shall tune the lyre,

And 'twould require

A Pindar's fire

To sing great Cowper's worth,

The lofty bard, delightful sage,

Ever the wonder of the age,

And *blessing to the earth.*'

Adieu, my precious cousin, your lofty bard and delightful sage expects you with all possible affection.—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

I am truly sorry for your poor friend Burrows!

Our dinner hour is four o'clock. We will not surfeit you with delicacies; of that be assured. I know your palate, and am glad to know that it is easily pleased. Were it other than it is, it would stand but a poor chance to be gratified at Olney. I undertake for lettuce and cucumber, and Mrs. U. for all the rest. If she feeds you too well, you must humble her.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Olney, June 19, 1786.

MY dear cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr. Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure-grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking room in the winter; two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs. Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is ever importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distant friends that I would gladly give them.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Olney, July 3, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption, now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh

is, as you observe, arrived, and has been with us near a fortnight. She pleases every body, and is pleased in her turn with every thing she finds at Olney; is always cheerful and sweet-tempered, and knows no pleasure equal to that of communicating pleasure to us, and to all around her. This disposition in her is the more comfortable, because it is not the humour of the day, a sudden flash of benevolence and good spirits, occasioned merely by a change of scene; but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first. We are consequently happy in her society, and shall be happier still to have you to partake with us in our joy. I can now assure you that her complexion is not at all indebted to art, having seen a hundred times the most convincing proof of its authenticity, her colour fading, and glowing again alternately as the weather, or her own temperature has happened to affect it, while she has been sitting before me. I am fond of the sound of bells, but was never more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made

amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years.

And now I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison,¹ and you sighed at the thought that your mother dwelt in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purpose of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to contain us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes

¹ Owing to its sham embattlements.

of the marsh miasma;¹ there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven.

I have hardly left myself room for an answer to your queries concerning my friend John, and his studies. What the supplement of Hirtius is made of, I know not. We did not read it at Westminster. I should imagine it might be dispensed with. I should recommend the civil war of Cæsar, because he wrote it, who ranks I believe as the best writer, as well as soldier, of his day. There are books (I know not what they are, but you do, and can easily find them) that will inform him clearly of both the civil and military management of the Romans, the several officers, I mean, in both departments; and what was the peculiar province of each. The study of some such book

¹ Cowper's attack upon the climatic and sanitary condition of Olney has been much taken to heart by some of its inhabitants, who feel this criticism of his the one flaw in the character of their great fellow-townsmen. Olney, they declare, was then, as it is still, one of the healthiest of towns, and that 'the fishy smelling fumes of the marsh miasma' had never any existence save in the poet's imagination.

would, I should think, prove a good introduction to that of Livy, unless you have a Livy with notes to that effect. A want of intelligence in those points has heretofore made the Roman history very dark and difficult to me; therefore I thus advise.

Our love is with all your lovelies, both great and small.—Yours ever,
W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Olney, July 4, 1786.

I REJOICE, my dear friend, that you have at last received my proposals, and most cordially thank you for all your labours in my service. I have friends in the world who, knowing that I am apt to be careless when left to myself, are determined to watch over me with a jealous eye upon this occasion. The consequence will be, that the work will be better executed, but more tardy in the production. To them I owe it, that my translation, as fast as it proceeds, passes under a revisal of the most accurate discerners of all blemishes. I know not whether I told you before, or now tell you for the first time, that I am in the hands of a very extraordinary person. He is intimate with my bookseller, and voluntarily offered his service. I was at first doubtful whether to accept it or not; but finding that my friends abovesaid were not to be satisfied on any other terms, though myself a perfect stranger to the man and his qualifications, except as he was recommended by Johnson, I at length consented, and have since found great reason to rejoice that I did. I called him an extraordinary person, and such he is; for he is not only versed in Homer, and accurate in his knowledge of the Greek to a degree that

entitles him to that appellation, but, though a foreigner, is a perfect master of our language, and has exquisite taste in English poetry. By his assistance I have improved many passages, supplied many oversights, and corrected many mistakes, such as will of course escape the most diligent and attentive labourer in such a work. I ought to add, because it affords the best assurance of his zeal and fidelity, that he does not toil for hire, nor will accept of any premium, but has entered on this business merely for his amusement. In the last instance my sheets will pass through the hands of our old schoolfellow Colman,¹ who has engaged to correct the press, and make any little alterations that he may see expedient. With all this precaution, little as I intended it once, I am now well satisfied. Experience has convinced me that other eyes than my own are necessary, in order that so long and arduous a task may be finished as it ought, and may neither discredit me, nor mortify and disappoint my friends. You, who I know interest yourself much and deeply in my success, will I dare say be satisfied with it too. Pope had many aids, and he who follows Pope ought not to walk alone.

Though I announce myself by my very under-

¹ George Colman (1732-1794), usually called 'the elder,' to distinguish him from his son, who also wrote comedies, was at Westminster School with Cowper. He started with Bonnell Thornton 'The Connoisseur' in 1754. In 1765 he translated the 'Comedies' of Terence, and in the following year he wrote, in conjunction with Garrick, *The Clandestine Marriage* a comedy that still holds the stage. During his management of Covent Garden Theatre he produced, in 1773, Goldsmith's celebrated play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and his name is also associated with Sheridan's *School for Scandal* for which he wrote an epilogue when it was produced at Drury Lane in 1777. At the time that Cowper is writing Colman was just recovering from a stroke of paralysis. In 1787 he issued his works in three volumes under the title of *Prose on Several Occasions, accompanied with some Pieces in Verse*.

taking to be one of Homer's most enraptured admirers, I am not a blind one. Perhaps the speech of Achilles given in my specimen is, as you hint, rather too much in the moralising strain, to suit so young a man, and of so much fire. But whether it be or not, in the course of the close application that I am forced to give to my author, I discover inadvertencies not a few; some perhaps that have escaped even the commentators themselves; or perhaps, in the enthusiasm of their idolatry, they resolved that they should pass for beauties. Homer, however, say what they will, was man, and in all the works of man, especially in a work of such length and variety, many things will of necessity occur, that might have been better. Pope and Addison had a Dennis; and Dennis, if I mistake not, held up as he has been to scorn and detestation, was a sensible fellow, and passed some censures upon both those writers that, had they been less just, would have hurt them less.¹ Homer had his Zoilus; and perhaps if we knew all that Zoilus said, we should be forced to acknowledge that sometimes at least he had reason on his side. But it is dangerous to find any fault at all with what the world is determined to esteem faultless.

I rejoice, my dear friend, that you enjoy some composure and cheerfulness of spirits: may God preserve and increase to you so great a blessing!—
I am affectionately and truly yours, W. C.

¹ John Dennis (1657-1734) was a critic who excited the wrath of the wits of his day; but Cowper's plea has been endorsed by others, Southey declaring that Dennis's critical pamphlets deserved republication. His plays were poor, however, and he is probably best remembered by his invention of a stage thunder, and by his ejaculation: 'The villains will play my thunder but not my plays.'

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

July, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am not glad that I am obliged to apologise for an interval of three weeks that have elapsed since the receipt of yours; but not having it in my power to write oftener than I do, I am glad that my reason is such a one as you admit. In truth, my time is very much occupied: and the more because I not only have a long and laborious work in hand, for such it would prove at any rate, but because I make it a point to bestow my utmost attention upon it, and to give it all the finishing that the most scrupulous accuracy can command. As soon as breakfast is over, I retire to my nutshell of a summer-house, which is my verse-manufactory, and here I abide seldom less than three hours, and not often more. In the afternoon I return to it again; and all the daylight that follows, except what is devoted to a walk, is given to Homer. It is well for me, that a course which is now become necessary is so much my choice. The regularity of it, indeed, has been in the course of this last week a little interrupted, by the arrival of my dear cousin Lady Hesketh; but with the new week I shall, as they say, turn over a new leaf, and put myself under the same rigorous discipline as before. Something, and not a little, is due to the feelings that the sight of the kindest relation that ever man was blest with must needs give birth to after so long a separation. But she, whose anxiety for my success is, I believe, greater than my own, will take care that I shall not play truant and neglect my proper business. It was an observation

of a sensible man, whom I knew well in ancient days (I mean when I was very young) that people are never in reality happy when they boast much of being so. I feel myself accordingly well content to say, without any enlargement on the subject, that an inquirer after happiness might travel far, and not find a happier trio, than meet every day, either in our parlour, or in the parlour at the vicarage. I will not say that mine is not occasionally somewhat dashed with the sable hue of those notions, concerning myself and my situation, that have occupied or rather possessed me so long: but on the other hand, I can also affirm, that my cousin's affectionate behaviour to us both, the sweetness of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation, relieve me in no small degree from the presence of them.

Mrs. Unwin bids me say how much she thanks you for your letter, which she will not fail to answer by the first opportunity. That she is not able to find one just now will not seem strange to you, when you shall consider for a moment how much she must necessarily have been, and must still be engaged on this occasion; the whole concern of providing for the comfortable accommodation of our new neighbour having fallen upon her. She is greatly pleased with your Sermons,¹ and has told me so repeatedly; and the pleasure that they have given her awaits me also in due time, as I am well and confidently assured: both because the subject of them is the greatest and the most interesting that can fall under the pen of any writer, and because no writer can be better qualified to discuss it judi-

¹ Newton's work *Messiah*.

ciously and feelingly than yourself. The third set with which you favoured us, we destine to Lady Hesketh; and in so disposing of them, are inclined to believe that we shall not err far from the mark at which you yourself directed them.

Mrs. Perry, who drank tea with us the day when her brother's child was buried at Olney, desired to be remembered to you and to Mrs. Newton, when I should write, with much affection. She seems as perfectly happy in her new situation, as in a world that will not admit of happiness absolutely perfect, it is possible to be. We were truly sorry to learn on that same day from Phœbe Warner the accident that Mrs. Newton had met with just before, and interest ourselves particularly on that account in the arrival of your next letter, which we hope will bring us an account of her being entirely cured of the painful consequences of it.

Tommy Bull has been very ill of a fever, and his father, consequently, has been very much distressed; but we had a glimpse of him last Tuesday, when he told us that his boy was better.

Our affectionate remembrances attend yourself and Mrs. Newton, to which you acquired an everlasting right while you dwelt under the roof where we dined yesterday. It is impossible that we should set our foot over the threshold of the vicarage without recollecting all your kindness.—
Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Olney, July 10, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—Having risen somewhat earlier than usual with me of late, and finding

myself in consequence of it in possession of a vacant half hour, I devote it notwithstanding the indulgence granted me to be silent, to you, and the rather because I have other good news to add to that which has already given you so much pleasure, and am unwilling that a friend who interests himself so much in my well-being should wait longer than is absolutely necessary for his share of my joy.

Within this twelve months my income has received an addition of a clear £100 per annum. For a considerable part of it I am indebted to my dear cousin now on the other side of the orchard. At Florence she obtained me twenty pounds a year from Lord Cowper; since he came home she has recommended me with such good effect to his notice, that he has added twenty more, twenty she has added herself, and ten she has procured me from the William of my name whom you saw at Hartingfordbury. From my anonymous friend, who insists on not being known or guessed at, and never shall by me, I have an annuity of £50.¹ All these sums have accrued within this year except the first, making together as you perceive an exact century of pounds annually poured into the replenished purse of your once poor poet of Olney. Is it possible to love such a cousin too much, who so punctually fulfils

¹ So the £100 was made up thus:—

Lord Cowper,	£20
Lady Hesketh,	20
William Cowper of the Park,	10
Theodora,	50
	<hr/>
	£100

her promise that she made me at the first revival of our correspondence, to make it the chief comfort of her life to promote, as much as possible, mine?

The more I see of the Throckmortons the more I like them. He is the most accomplished man of his years that I remember to have seen; is always sensible in conversation and kind in his behaviour, and conducts himself handsomely and unexceptionably in the business of landlord and tenant. She is cheerful and good-natured to the last degree, and is, as you suppose, a niece of Lord Petre's.

Since we dined with them, I have dined with Lady Hesketh at Gayhurst. It happened and it hurt us all, the Throckmortons as well as ourselves, that your mother was not asked, consequently did not go. At first I was doubtful whether I would go myself, but thinking it the part of charity to suppose that, obscurely as we have lived at Olney, a family five miles distant might not know that she existed, I went. To-day your mother will meet Mrs. Wrighte at dinner at Lady H.'s, and it will consequently no longer be a secret to Mrs. Wrighte that there is such a person as Mrs. Unwin. We shall then see whether I am ever to visit again at Gayhurst or not.

Your mother's love with mine attends you all.

She wishes that the fish may come on Thursday else it must be eaten on Sunday, which is the only day when the trio do not meet.

I am summoned to breakfast.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

We long for the 18th.

July 11.—Your mother has been asked to Gayhurst, and will be of the party the next time we go. Lady H. sends her compliments; nobody now stands so fair as yourself for her chaplainship, you need only come and enter immediately on your office.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

August 5, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am neither idle nor forgetful; on the contrary I think of you often, and my thoughts would more frequently find their way to my pen, were I not of necessity every day occupied in Homer. This long business engrosses all my mornings, and when the days grow shorter will have all my evenings too; at present they are devoted to walking, an exercise to me as necessary as my food.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house¹ that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty: yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would have furnished me with a larger space.

¹ Weston Lodge.

You say, well, that there was a time when I was happy at Olney; and I am now as happy at Olney as I expect to be anywhere without the presence of God. Change of situation is with me no otherwise an object than as both Mrs. Unwin's health and mine may happen to be concerned in it. A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours issuing from flooded meadows; and we in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse, for sitting so often, and sometime for months, over a cellar,¹ filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands; and as we may reasonably hope, of course, their consequences. But as for happiness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it, in company with felons and outlaws, in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burthen, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him. The dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I be-

¹ Now done away with.

gan to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore, and I prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed: those hopes have been blasted; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped, even by the arch-enemy himself, as to be made to question the divine nature of them; but I have been made to believe (which, you will say, is being duped still more) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance. Such, however, is, and has been my persuasion many a long day; and when I shall think on that subject more comfortably, or, as you will be inclined to tell me, more rationally and scripturally, I know not. In the mean time, I embrace with alacrity every alleviation of my case, and with the more alacrity, because whatsoever proves a relief of my distress, is a cordial to Mrs. Unwin, whose sympathy with me, through the whole of it, has been such, that, despair excepted, her burthen has been as heavy as mine. Lady Hesketh, by her affectionate behaviour, the cheerfulness of her conversation, and the constant sweetness of her temper, has cheered us both; and Mrs. Unwin not less than me. By her help we get change of air and of scene, though still resident at Olney; and by her means have intercourse with some families in this country, with whom, but for her, we could never have been acquainted. Her presence here would, at any time, even in my happiest days, have been a comfort to me; but, in the present day, I am doubly sensible of its value. She leaves nothing unsaid, nothing un-

done, that she thinks will be conducive to our well-being; and, so far as she is concerned, I have nothing to wish, but that I could believe her sent hither in mercy to myself,—then I should be thankful.

I understand that Mr. Bull is in town. If you should see him and happen to remember it, be so good as to tell him that we called at his door yesterday evening. All were well, but Mrs. B. and Mr. Greatheed¹ were both abroad.

I am, my dear friend, with Mrs. Unwin's love to Mrs. N. and yourself, hers and yours, as ever,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

August 9, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I scratch a very few lines, just to prevent your saying—Well, I think the poet might contrive to afford a few minutes, notwithstanding his Homerican occupation.

I hope that you have by this time completely recovered from the indisposition occasioned by your journey. The day after your departure, Lady Hesketh said, Now we want Mr. Unwin. Her reason, at least one of her reasons, for saying so was that we had spent near half an hour together without laughing:—an interval of gravity that does not often occur where you are present.

She has not yet heard from Mr. Hornby. If a letter should arrive by this day's post, I will insert notice of it before I close mine. We infer from his silence that he had not previously engaged himself before the receipt of hers. He has, I suppose, like

¹ Rev. Samuel Greatheed.

most men of large fortune, who see much company, a *cacoethes* not of *scribendi* but of *non scribendi*.

Sir Robert Throckmorton is not dead,—on the contrary, alive and likely to live the longer for having had an eresypylatose eruption. That word is so seldom in my use that I will not swear I have spelt it right. If you should be equally uncertain, consult the apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton gave me yesterday a morning call, and was very chatty and agreeable. To-day we dine there. He performs for us at Weston with the liberality of a gentleman landlord, and spares no expense to make our future residence both smart and commodious. My cousin is, for her part, lavish of all manner of good things, and sets no bounds to her kindness, so you are likely to see us next year, at all points well accommodated. You will hear from her, by the way, as soon as she hears from Mr. Hornby.

I have had a most obliging letter from Mr. Smith at Clifton, giving me an account of his recovery that afforded me, as you will believe, true pleasure, inquiring when I shall send Homer to press, and assuring me that the notice of it had raised more expectation of it in the world than he could have supposed it possible a mere notice should; and including withal a twenty pound bill for his children,—the poor.

Adieu, my dear William. Pandarus and Diomede are on fire to combat, breakfast is ready, and the moment I have swallowed it, I must commit them in terrible conflict.

Your mother's warmest love and mine attend you and yours. My sweet cousin sends her affectionate compliments.—Ever yours, WM. COWPER.

Thanks for the good fish *tui memores comedienses*. Tell me in your next at what time you shall go again to London, for I must trouble you to buy me a hat, a service which none performs so well as you.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

August 24, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I catch a minute by the tail and hold it fast, while I write to you. The moment it is fled I must go to breakfast. The post that brought me your speculations on the subject of your future pupil, conveyed to you I suppose Lady Hesketh's letter on the same subject, which has no doubt given you satisfaction. I saw Mr. Hornby's letter, than which nothing could be more handsome. His sole remark on the matter of stipend is this,—that in placing the young gentleman under the influence of such excellent tuition, he confers on him a greater advantage than he could secure to him by any other means. You see, therefore, that he is a wise man, knows how to value the opportunity, and that erudition, etc., are better than house and land; for that

When house and land are gone and spent,
Then larning is most excellent.

I wish you all possible success with him, and that the Muses nine, with Apollo at their head, may brighten his intellects, and make him readily susceptible of all that you shall endeavour to infuse.

I am still occupied in refining and polishing, and shall this morning give the finishing hand to the seventh book. Fuseli does me the honour to say that the most difficult, and most interesting parts

of the poem, are admirably rendered. But because he did not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them; not but that I have retouched considerably, and make better still, the best. In short I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A storyteller, so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music, of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connection with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off, and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter-evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office.

I will subjoin the measure of my hat. Let the new one be furnished *à la mode*.—Believe me, my dear William, truly yours,
W. C.

Mr. Throckmorton will, I doubt not, procure Lord Petre's name, if he can, without any hint from me. He could not interest himself more in my

success than he seems to do. Could he get the Pope to subscribe, I should have him ; and should be glad of him and the whole conclave.

The outside circumference of the hat crown is two feet one inch and an eighth.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You are my mahogany box, with a slip in the lid of it, to which I commit my productions of the lyric kind, in perfect confidence that there they are safe, and will go no farther. All who are attached to the jingling art have this peculiarity, that they would find no pleasure in the exercise, had they not one friend at least to whom they might publish what they have composed. If you approve my Latin, and your wife and sister my English, this, together with the approbation of your mother, is fame enough for me.

He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle, I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do. I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes, as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties which, though they never existed,

are more captivating than any that ever did ; accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with my master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance ? It follows on the other side.

[Torn off.]

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You are sometimes indebted to bad weather, but more frequently to a dejected state of mind, for my punctuality as a correspondent. This was the case when I composed that tragi-comical ditty for which you thank me : my spirits were exceedingly low, and having no fool or jester at hand, I resolved to be my own. The end was answered ; I laughed myself, and I made you laugh. Sometimes I pour out my thoughts in a mournful strain ; but these sable effusions your mother will not suffer me to send you, being resolved that nobody shall share with me the burthen of my melancholy but herself. In general you may suppose that I am remarkably sad when I seem remarkably merry. The effort we make to get rid of a load is usually violent in proportion to the weight of it. I have seen at Sadler's Wells a tight little fellow dancing with a fat man upon his shoulders ; to those who looked at him, he seemed insensible of the incumbrance ; but if a physician had felt his pulse, when the feat was over, I suppose he would have found the effect of it there. Perhaps you remember the Undertakers' dance in the Rehearsal,

which they perform in crape hat-bands and black cloaks, to the tune of 'Hob or Nob,' one of the sprightliest airs in the world. Such is my fiddling, and such is my dancing; but they serve a purpose which at some certain times could not be so effectually promoted by any thing else.

I am informed that *Thelyphthora* is at last encountered by a writer of abilities equal to the task. An answer to that base-born book was a grand desideratum in the world of literature. I call it so because it is the spurious issue of Scripture violated by misinterpretation. The mother is ashamed of the brat, and disowns it in every page; but the father (a father is sometimes proud of his bastard) dandles it upon his knee, and holds it up to the admiration of all beholders. This champion for the rights and honours of single marriage comes forth in the *Monthly Review*: I have not yet seen the first specimen of his performance, which belongs to October, but have ordered it down from London. The character I have received of it has pleased me much, and if I find it answer upon the perusal, I shall connect the detached parts of it (for it is to be a work of some continuance) and bind them up together. It is high time this false light should be extinguished: it has alarmed many families, misled many readers, and confirmed not a few in practices which their own consciences condemned, till that Siren song deceived them.—You will think perhaps I talk big for one that has never read it: but I am acquainted with the principal hinges on which the whole depends, and am persuaded that one flash of truth would melt them. Mr. Riland of Birmingham sent into this country a string of twenty-seven

printed queries, unanswerable he thinks, unless in such a way as must unavoidably induce a necessity of adopting Mr. Madan's plan. But being persuaded that even I was a match for such an enemy, I ventured upon the formidable task, and gave them twenty-seven answers. Indeed a child might have done the same, and I wonder less at the author's predilection in favour of his own conceptions (which is a partiality natural enough) than that he has found, and among ministers too, understanding so scantily enlightened, or so easily perverted, as to afford them welcome entertainment.

I mourn with you over the tender conscience of your collector, whose peace of mind is so inconsistent with your interest, that he cannot think he does his duty unless he wrongs you. You think the man's meaning is good! you have a world of charity; what is it to him from whose purse the tax is taken? It is his business to gather it; when that is done, he has discharged his office. You are not quite so much like Falstaff, as he is like Mr. Dumbledon, of whom Falstaff would have borrowed money, and when he refused to lend him any, the knight called him a rascally worsted stocking, yea, forsooth, knave. A tender conscience is always entitled to respect, but a scrupulous one deserves suspicion. The man may be very honest for aught I know; but I am sure you are so; and he ought to know that a man of your principles would not endeavour to force him upon a conduct incompatible with his oath.

I have endeavoured to comply with your request, though I am not good at writing upon a given subject. Your mother, however, comforts me by

her approbation, and I steer myself in all that I produce by her judgment. If she does not understand me at the first reading, I am sure the lines are obscure, and always alter them; if she laughs, I know it is not without reason; and if she says, 'that's well, it will do'—I have no fear that any body else should find fault with it. She is my lady chamberlain, who licenses all I write.

TO MISS CREUZÉ, ON HER BIRTHDAY.

How many between east and west,
Disgrace their parent earth,
Whose days constrain us to detest
The day that gave them birth;

Not so when Stella's natal morn
Revolving months restore,
We can rejoice that she was born,
And wish her born once more!

If you like it, use it: if not, you know the remedy. It is serious, yet epigrammatic,—like a bishop at a ball!

W. C.

P.S.—I have read the Review; it is learned and wise,
Clean, candid, and witty,—Thelyphthora dies.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sensibly mortified at finding myself obliged to disappoint you; but though I have had many thoughts upon the subject you propose to my consideration, I have had none that have been favourable to the undertaking. I applaud your purpose, for the sake of the principle from which it springs; but I look upon the evils you mean to animadvert upon, as too obstinate and inveterate ever to be expelled by the means you

mention. The very persons to whom you would address your remonstrance, are themselves sufficiently aware of their enormity : years ago, to my knowledge, they were frequently the topics of conversation at polite tables ; they have been frequently mentioned in both Houses of Parliament ; and I suppose there is hardly a member of either who would not immediately assent to the necessity of reformation, were it proposed to him in a reasonable way. But there it stops ; and there it will for ever stop, till the majority are animated with a zeal in which they are at present deplorably defective. A religious man is unfeignedly shocked when he reflects upon the prevalence of such crimes ; a moral man must needs be so in a degree, and will affect to be much more so than he is. But how many do you suppose there are among our worthy representatives that come under either of these descriptions ? If all were such, yet to new model the police of the country, which must be done in order to make even unavoidable perjury less frequent, were a task they would hardly undertake, on account of the great difficulty that would attend it. Government is too much interested in the consumption of malt-liquor to reduce the number of venders. Such plausible pleas may be offered in defence of travelling on Sundays, especially by the trading part of the world, as the whole bench of bishops would find it difficult to overrule. And with respect to the violation of oaths, till a certain name is more generally respected than it is at present, however such persons as yourself may be grieved at it, the legislature are never likely to lay it to heart. I do not mean, nor would by any means attempt to discourage you in so

laudable an enterprise; but such is the light in which it appears to me, that I do not feel the least spark of courage qualifying or prompting me to embark in it myself. An exhortation therefore written by me—by hopeless desponding me—would be flat, insipid, and uninteresting; and disgrace the cause, instead of serving it. If after what I have said, however, you still retain the same sentiments, *Macte esto virtute tuâ*; there is nobody better qualified than yourself, and may your success prove that I despaired of it without a reason.—Adieu, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I write under the impression of a difficulty not easily surmounted, the want of something to say. Letter-spinning is generally more entertaining to the writer than the reader: for your sake, therefore, I would avoid it, but a dearth of materials is very apt to betray one into a trifling strain, in spite of all one's endeavours to be serious.

What have you done with your perverse parishioner? Perhaps when he has put a lock upon his pew, he may shut himself up in it oftener than he used to do: you remember a certain story about the boy and his trunk. The consciousness that the seat is become his own so emphatically that he can exclude everybody else, may make him fond of it. I believe many a man that keeps a carriage rides in it because he keeps one, though sometimes he would otherwise prefer a walk.

I lay by my paper for the present;—I really can go on no further.

I left off on Saturday, this present being Monday morning, and I renew the attempt, in hopes that I may possibly catch some subject by the end, and be more successful.

So have I seen the maids in vain
Tumble and tease a tangled skein :
They bite the lip, they scratch the head,
And cry—'The deuce is in the thread !'
They torture it, and jerk it round,
Till the right end at last is found ;
Then wind, and wind, and wind away,
And what was work is changed to play.

When I wrote the first two lines, I thought I had engaged in a hazardous enterprise ; for, thought I, should my poetical vein be as dry as my prosaic, I shall spoil the sheet, and send nothing at all ; for I could on no account endure the thought of beginning again. But I think I have succeeded to admiration, and am willing to flatter myself that I have seen even a worse impromptu in the newspapers.

Though we live in a nook, and the world is quite unconscious that there are any such beings in it as ourselves, yet we are not unconcerned about what passes in it. The present awful crisis, big with the fate of England, engages much of our attention. The action is probably over by this time, and though we know it not, the grand question is decided, whether the war shall roar in our own once peaceful fields, or whether we shall still only hear of it at a distance. I can compare the nation to no similitude more apt than that of an ancient castle that had been for days assaulted by the battering ram. It was long before the stroke of that engine made any sensible impression ; but

the continual repetition at length communicated a slight tremor to the wall; the next, and the next, and the next blow increased it. Another shock puts the whole mass in motion, from the top to the foundation: it bends forward, and is every moment driven farther from the perpendicular; till at last the decisive blow is given, and down it comes. Every million that has been raised within the last century has had an effect upon the constitution like that of a blow from the aforesaid ram upon the aforesaid wall. The impulse becomes more and more important, and the impression it makes is continually augmented; unless, therefore, something extraordinary intervenes to prevent it,—you will find the consequence at the end of my simile.—
Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

As I promised you verse, if you would send me a frank, I am not willing to return the cover without some,¹ though I think I have already wearied you by the prolixity of my prose.

I must refer you to those unaccountable gaddings and caprices of the human mind, for the cause of this production; for in general I believe there is no man who has less to do with the ladies' cheeks than I have. I suppose it would be best to antedate it, and to imagine that it was written twenty years ago, for my mind was never more in a trifling, butterfly

¹ This letter enclosed the poem *The Lily and the Rose* commencing:—

The nymph must lose her female friend
If more admired than she;
But where will fierce contention end
If flowers can disagree, etc.

trim than when I composed it, even in the earliest parts of my life, And what is worse than all this, I have translated it into Latin :—but that some other time.—Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—How apt we are to deceive ourselves where self is in question ! you say I am in your debt, and I accounted you in mine ; a mistake to which you must attribute my arrears, if indeed I owe you any, for I am not backward to write where the uppermost thought is welcome.

I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally furnished me with : I did not indeed read many of Johnson's Classics ; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again : and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all ;—I tasted most of them, and did not like them. It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill,¹ the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet : I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely

¹ Charles Churchill (1731-1764), a contemporary of Cowper's at Westminster School. Became curate of South Cadbury in Somersetshire, and afterwards at Rainham. Published the *Rosciad* in 1761, and discovered that his vocation was literature rather than the Church. Henceforth his gift of satire was acknowledged on all hands. *Gotham*, to which Cowper here gives his homage, was issued in 1764. Churchill is buried in St. Martin's Churchyard, Dover.

unqualified, merely because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him. He has inserted in it but one anecdote of consequence, for which he refers you to a novel, and introduces the story with doubts about the truth of it. But his barrenness as a biographer I could forgive, if the simpleton had not thought himself a judge of his writings, and under the erroneous influence of that thought, informed his reader that *Gotham*, *Independence*, and the *Times*, were catchpennies. *Gotham*, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which I make no doubt the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden in his *Absalom and Achitophel* stands in need of the same indulgence), for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance. *Independence* is a most animated piece, full of strength and spirit, and marked with that bold, masculine character which, I think, is the great peculiarity of this writer. And the *Times* (except that the subject is disgusting to the last degree), stands equally high in my opinion. He is indeed a careless writer for the most part; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer, which he lays to the charge of others. A

proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertency and hurry unavoidably have departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A racehorse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in the riding-school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph :

*‘ Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent.’*

Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Olney, Aug. 31, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I began to fear for your health, and every day said to myself,—I must write to Bagot soon, if it be only to ask him how he does,—a measure that I should certainly have pursued long since had I been less absorbed in Homer than I am. But such are my engagements in that quarter, that they make me, I think, good for little else.

Many thanks, my friend, for the names that you have sent me. The Bagots will make a most conspicuous figure among my subscribers, and I shall not, I hope, soon forget my obligations to them.

The unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse. But where is the remedy? In vain should you or I, and a few hundreds more perhaps who have studied his versification, tell them of the superior majesty of it, and that for that majesty it is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears, they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits, and are therefore not to be endured. There is a whimsical inconsistency in the judgment of modern readers in this particular. Ask them all round, whom do you account the best writer of blank verse? and they will reply to a man, Milton, to be sure; Milton against the field! Yet if a writer of the present day should construct his numbers exactly upon Milton's plan, not one in fifty of these professed admirers of Milton would endure him. The case standing thus, what is to be done? An author must either be contented to give disgust to the generality, or he must humour them by sinning against his own judgment. This latter course, so far as elisions are concerned, I have adopted as essential to my success. In every other respect I give as much variety in my measure as I can, I believe I may say as in ten syllables it is possible to give, shifting perpetually the pause and cadence,

and accounting myself happy that modern refinement has not yet enacted laws against this also. If it had, I protest to you I would have dropped my design of translating Homer entirely; and with what an indignant stateliness of reluctance I make them the concession that I have mentioned, Mrs. Unwin can witness, who hears all my complaints upon the subject.

After having lived twenty years at Olney, we are on the point of leaving it, but shall not migrate far. We have taken a house in the village of Weston. Lady Hesketh is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air, and a more walkable country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here for so many winters has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer, she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood. There, my dear friend, I shall be happy to see you, and to thank you in person for all your kindness.

I do not wonder at the judgment that you form of Fuseli, a foreigner; but you may assure yourself that, foreigner as he is, he has an exquisite taste in English verse. The man is all fire, and an enthusiast in the highest degree on the subject of Homer, and has given me more than once a jog, when I have been inclined to nap with my author. No cold water is to be feared from him that might abate my own fire, rather perhaps too much combustible.

Adieu! *mon ami*, yours faithfully, W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON

Olney, Sept. 2, 1786.

SIR,—I enclose a bill on Messrs. Child and Co. for the sum of twenty-two pounds one shilling, drawn by Mr. Walter Bagot, and dated Blithfield, Aug. 28, 1786, and add the names of his friends who have subscribed it. Some time since I wrote to desire that you would enter the Rev. Walter Bagot himself, as a subscriber of twenty pounds, and shall be obliged to you if you will now send him a receipt for that sum (for which I will account with you in due time), together with receipts for the following persons, under cover to the Rt. Hon. Lord Bagot, Blithfield near Lichfield, Staffordshire. You will observe that they have all made the full payment, and all subscribe for royal paper; and I beg that you will be so kind as to enter them on the subscription board immediately.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Bagot, 2 copies R. P.	6	6	0
Rt. Hon. Lady Bagot, 1 copy do.	3	3	0
Rt. Hon. Earl of Uxbridge, 1 copy do.	3	3	0
Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Norwich, 1			
copy do.,	3	3	0
Charles Chester, Esq., 1 copy do. .	3	3	0
William Swinnerton, Esq., 1 copy do.	3	3	0
	<hr/>		
	£22	1	0

Present, sir, if you please my compliments to your friend, Mr. Fuseli, and tell him that I shall be obliged to him if, when he has finished the revisal of the eighth book, he will be so kind as to send it to General Cowper's in Charles Street,

together with his strictures. Assure him likewise that I will endeavour by the closest attention to all the peculiarities of my original, to save him as much trouble as I can, hereafter. I now perfectly understand what it is that he requires in a translator of Homer, and being convinced of the justness of his demands, will attempt at least to conform to them. Some escapes will happen in so long a work, which he will know how to account for and to pardon. I have been employed a considerable time in the correction of the first seven books, and have not yet begun the ninth, but shall in a day or two; and will send it as soon as finished.—I am, sir, your most humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Olney, Sept. 24, 1786.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—So interesting a concern as your tutorship of the young gentleman in question cannot have been so long in a state of indecision without costing you much anxiety. We have sympathised with you under it all, but are glad to be informed that the long delay is not chargeable upon Mr. Hornby. Bishops are *κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί*.—You have heard, I know, from Lady Hesketh, and she has exculpated me from all imputation of wilful silence, from which, indeed, of yourself you are so good as to discharge me, in consideration of my present almost endless labour. I have nothing to say in particular on the subject of Homer, except that I am daily advancing in the work with all the despatch that a due concern for my own credit in the result will allow.

You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browse upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel. That many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney; by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. We do not at all doubt it;—we never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful of such productions, we do and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful (for wonderful

it would be at any rate), because she sent him not long before a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality as ought to have convinced him that she at least was no wanderer. But what is the fact, and how do we spend our [time] in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening and sometimes by myself, which, however, your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found anywhere. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick;—except indeed that, by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

My dear William, I do not know that I should

have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars. He would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could of all our enormities! Adieu!

Our sincerest love to yourself and yours,

WM. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Sept. 30, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have

been grieved, they have been misinformed ; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports ; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another ; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which, in fact, it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst ; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance : more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Bozeat turnpike and back again ; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

‘ The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more.’

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connections ; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them ; and that St. Paul

himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the mean time I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last:—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final; and she, seeking His return to me in the path

of duty, and by continual prayer.—Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The fish happening to swim uppermost in my mind, I give it the precedence, and begin with returning our thanks for it, not forgetting the circumstance of free carriage. Upon the whole, I think this a handsomer way of acknowledging a present than to tuck it into a postscript.

I find the *Register* in all respects an entertaining medley; but especially in this, that it has brought to my view some long forgotten pieces of my own production;—I mean by the way two or three. These I have marked with my own initials, and you may be sure I found them peculiarly agreeable, as they had not only the grace of being mine, but that of novelty likewise to recommend them. It is at least twenty years since I saw them. You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have no more right to the name of a poet than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer; but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle,—very entertaining to the trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can

seldom bear to look at it when it is once finished. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses of its value, till I am at last quite disgusted with it. I then throw it by, take it up again perhaps ten years after, and am as much delighted with it as at first.

Few people have the art of being agreeable when they talk of themselves; if you are not weary therefore by this time you pay me a high compliment.

I dare say Miss Shuttleworth was much diverted with the conjecture of her friends. The true key to the pleasure she found at Olney was plain enough to be seen, but they chose to overlook it. She brought with her a disposition to be pleased, which whoever does is sure to find a visit agreeable, because they make it so.

Your mother joins me in affectionate remembrances to all your family.—Yours, W. C.

We are obliged to little John for his P.S., and think his observation very just, but are a little doubtful about the exactness of his calculation.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

Olney, Oct. 6, 1786.

You have not heard, I suppose, that the ninth book of my translation is at the bottom of the Thames. But it is even so. A storm overtook it on its way to Kingston, and it sunk, together with the whole cargo of the boat in which it was a passenger; not figuratively foreshowing, I hope, by its submersion, the fate of all the rest. My kind and generous cousin, who leaves nothing undone that she thinks can conduce to my comfort, encourage-

ment, or convenience, is my transcriber also. *She* wrote the copy, and *she* will have to write it again—*Hers* therefore is the damage. I have a thousand reasons to lament that the time approaches when we must lose her. She has made a winterly summer a most delightful one, but the winter itself we must spend without her. W. C.

V. AT WESTON UNDERWOOD

After living at Olney nineteen years Cowper, in November 1786, removed to Weston Lodge, a large and convenient house in the middle of the village of Weston Underwood. His first letter from Weston is to the Rev. Walter Bagot.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston Underwood, Nov. 17, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—There are some things that do not actually shorten the life of man, yet seem to do so, and frequent removals from place to place are of that number. For my own part, at least, I am apt to think if I had been more stationary, I should seem to myself to have lived longer. My many changes of habitation have divided my time into many short periods, and when I look back upon them they appear only as the stages in a day's journey, the first of which is at no very great distance from the last.

I lived longer at Olney than anywhere. There indeed I lived till mouldering walls and a tottering house warned me to depart.¹ I have accordingly

¹ The house was thoroughly restored about 1890, and the back rebuilt. It is now in good repair.

taken the hint, and two days since arrived, or rather took up my abode, at Weston. You perhaps have never made the experiment, but I can assure you that the confusion which attends a transmigration of this kind is infinite, and has a terrible effect in deranging the intellects. I have been obliged to renounce my Homer on the occasion, and, though not for many days, I yet feel as if study and meditation, so long my confirmed habits, were on a sudden become impracticable, and that I shall certainly find them so when I attempt them again. But, in a scene so much quieter and pleasanter than that which I have just escaped from, in a house so much more commodious, and with furniture about me so much more to my taste, I shall hope to recover my literary tendency again, when once the bustle of the occasion shall have subsided.

How glad I should be to receive you under a roof where you would find me so much more comfortably accommodated than at Olney! I know your warmth of heart towards me, and am sure that you would rejoice in my joy. At present indeed I have not had time for much self-gratulation, but have every reason to hope nevertheless that in due time I shall derive considerable advantage, both in health and spirits, from the alteration made in my *whereabout*.

I have now the twelfth book of the *Iliad* in hand, having settled the eleven first books finally, as I think, or nearly so. The winter is the time when I make the greatest riddance.—Adieu, my friend Walter! Let me hear from you, and believe me,
ever yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Weston Underwood, Nov. 17, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My usual time of answering your letters having been unavoidably engrossed by occasions that would not be thrust aside, I have been obliged to postpone the payment of my debt for a whole week. Even now it is not without some difficulty that I discharge it; which you will easily believe, when I tell you that this is only the second day that has seen us inhabitants of our new abode. When God speaks to a chaos, it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonised. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, in the evening, Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu

to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery ; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God ; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of His absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one ; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled ; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants ; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest ; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be ; but better accommodated you may and will be.

I have not proceeded thus far without many interruptions, and though my paper is small, shall be obliged to make my letter still smaller. Our own removal is, I believe, the only news of Olney. Concerning this you will hear much, and much I doubt not that will have no truth in it. It is already

reported there, and has been indeed for some time, that I am turned Papist. You will know how to treat a lie like this which proves nothing but the malignity of its author; but other tales you may possibly hear that will not so readily refute themselves. This, however, I trust you will always find true, that neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself shall have so conducted ourselves in our new neighbourhood, as that you shall have any occasion to be grieved on our account.

Mr. Unwin has been ill of a fever at Winchester, but by a letter from Mr. Thornton we learn that he is recovering, and hopes soon to travel. His Mrs. Unwin has joined him at that place.

Adieu, my dear friend. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances and mine conclude me ever yours,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston Lodge, Nov. 26, 1786.

It is my birthday, my beloved cousin, and I determine to employ a part of it, that it may not be destitute of festivity, in writing to you. The dark, thick fog that has obscured it, would have been a burthen to me at Olney, but here I have hardly attended to it. The neatness and snugness of our abode compensate all the dreariness of the season, and whether the ways are wet or dry, our house at least is always warm and commodious. Oh for you, my cousin, to partake these comforts with us! I will not begin already to tease you upon that subject, but Mrs. Unwin remembers to have heard from your own lips, that you hate London in the spring. Perhaps therefore

by that time, you may be glad to escape from a scene which will be every day growing more disagreeable, that you may enjoy the comforts of the lodge. You well know that the best house has a desolate appearance unfurnished. This house accordingly, since it has been occupied by us and our *meubles*, is as much superior to what it was when you saw it, as you can imagine. The parlour is even elegant. When I say that the parlour is elegant, I do not mean to insinuate that the study¹ is not so. It is neat, warm, and silent, and a much better study than I deserve, if I do not produce in it an incomparable translation of Homer. I think every day of those lines of Milton, and congratulate myself on having obtained, before I am quite superannuated, what he seems not to have hoped for sooner :

‘ And may at length my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage !’

For if it is not an hermitage, at least it is a much better thing ; and you must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bedchambers of convenient dimensions ; in short, exactly such a house as this.

The Throckmortons continue the most obliging neighbours in the world. One morning last week, they both went with me to the cliff ;—a scene, my dear, in which you would delight beyond measure, but which you cannot visit except in the spring or autumn. The heat of summer, and the clinging dirt of winter would destroy you. What is called

¹ The room on the right as you enter.

the cliff, is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration.

Wintry as the weather is, do not suspect that it confines me. I ramble daily, and every day change my ramble. Wherever I go, I find short grass under my feet, and when I have travelled perhaps five miles come home with shoes not at all too dirty for a drawing-room. I was pacing yesterday under the elms, that surround the field in which stands the great alcove,¹ when lifting my eyes I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours. They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get at me. You see therefore, my dear, that I am in some request. Alas! in too much request with some people. The verses of Cadwallader have found me at last.

I am charmed with your account of our little cousin² at Kensington. If the world does not spoil him hereafter, he will be a valuable man.

Good night, and may God bless thee. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Dec. 4, 1786.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It distresses me to think that this cannot reach you before the newspapers

¹ See *The Task*, Book I., 278.

² 'Our little cousin' would be George Augustus, afterwards fourth Earl Cowper (1776-1799), who was at this time ten years of age.

will inform you of the death of our dear friend at Winchester, an event for which after the favourable accounts I sent you, you cannot be but indifferently prepared. Those accounts however were such as we received ourselves, and were well warranted at the time when they were sent to us, by such appearances as seemed to afford the most reasonable hope of his recovery. A sudden turn in his distemper has, nevertheless, baffled that hope, and has in a few moments bereaved us, respecting poor Unwin, of every consolation, except the invaluable certainty of his being thither gone whence none who loved him as he deserved can deliberately wish him to return. Instead of saying more, my dear, on this melancholy subject, I will subjoin a copy of Mr. Henry Thornton's last letter, which we received this morning. It came accompanied by another which ought to have reached us by the preceding post, but which being delayed by some accident, came with it. Poor Mrs. Unwin you will suppose is in great affliction, but she bears her severe heart-aches with a resignation to the will of God, that does Him and herself honour. She sends her love to you. Here follows the letter :—

MADAM,—I wrote you a discouraging letter yesterday, which my fears for Mr. Unwin very naturally suggested even at the time when I wrote it. My letter was written on Tuesday evening. His fever was then unabated, though he was free from pain, clear and distinct in his head and recollection, and more composed than he had been at almost any period of his illness. On Tuesday night, seeing no very certain and instant danger, I prevailed on

Mrs. Unwin to lie down for a few hours while the physician and I sat up with him. About three in the morning I had about half an hour's very comfortable conversation with him alone. He was as sensible of his danger as I could be, and as calm and collected as ever he was in his life; mentioned many of his friends, to whom he desired to be remembered, and particularly named yourself, as well as Mr. Cowper and Lady Hesketh. He talked even of his own interment, and of everything that it might be useful to me (as a joint-executor with his wife) to know. He desired me to read a prayer to him, and one or two psalms. The hope he expressed of eternal happiness was a very humble one (as indeed it always has been), but to his friends by no means therefore the less sure. His mind was calm upon this and every other subject. He asked me if there were no hopes at all of his recovery; to which I answered him, that there were little or none. He continued therefore perfectly sensible of his own dissolution for several hours after, and was so calm and so little dismayed, that those around him who knew the irritability of his habit and his fears on this as well as every affecting subject, were much comforted during their attention to him. About seven in the morning Mrs. Unwin came down to him, while I lay down for an hour or two. He was still sensible. Between ten and eleven his head seemed a little confused, but no other alteration appeared. In half an hour after, his doctor from Salisbury went up to see him, and he desired to be raised in his bed as usual, but as he seemed, while they raised him, to breathe rather harder than before, the doctor hinted to me that I

should lead Mrs. Unwin (who had helped to raise him) out of the room ; and in a few minutes his breath gradually spent itself without any appearance of struggle.

This, my dear, is not the end of the letter, but it is all that relates to the death-bed circumstances of this valuable man. The disorder that was immediately followed by these dying symptoms was in his bowels, and seized him, I think, the day before his decease. It did not indeed last many hours, but seems to have left him perfectly exhausted. The fever was a putrid one. Mr. Thornton caught it first, but being stronger soon recovered. Poor Unwin fell its victim. What we must do now, my dear, for a tutor to little Hesketh I know not. My stock of recommendation was soon exhausted. Mr. Hornby will be himself, I suppose, the likeliest person to find a third. Surely there was never any thing more extraordinary than the deaths of two, chosen with such religious attention to their qualifications, just before they could enter on their office. Man boasts himself wise, yet to man is every thing inscrutable.

The chairs lie still in the warehouse of the inn at Smithfield. We sent this morning to inquire after them, and Rogers the Great knows nought about them. We must hope for them next week. Mr. Newton writes me word that they are at this time doing me the honour to read my *Task* at Freemasons' Hall. It could not have a more effectual advertisement, nor one more likely to occasion a speedy call for a third edition. Perhaps it may have the fate of John Gilpin, who was little known

or noticed for a long time after his first appearance, and then made noise enough. I have a letter from a Mr. Biddlecombe of Somerford, near Christ Church, in the New Forest, expressive of the pleasure that my volumes have given to him, and inviting me to visit him, if I should ever find myself in that part of Hampshire. I answer it by this post. You shall see it, my dear, as soon as I can send it franked. I am obliged also to write to Mr. H. Thornton by this post, which occasions you a shorter letter; but I have still something to say. I have finished the twelfth book, and when Mr. Throckmorton and I were walking together on Friday morning, I told him that I had a design to call upon Mrs. T. for her obliging and kind offer made me last summer. He immediately recollected it, and said with a smile—‘You mean, I suppose, to transcribe for you? She will do it with great pleasure.’—The next morning I sent her that same twelfth book, and understand that she has been hard at work. Unfortunately they leave the country on Tuesday, so that she will not be able, I suppose, to finish. She told me however this minute, when she stopped on horseback at the gate, that she had transcribed eleven pages. He was with me when she called, and they are gone together to Gayhurst.

Adieu, my precious! I am going to refresh myself with air and sunshine this fine morning, having been imprisoned all yesterday by the rain.
—Ever your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

We shall be forced to trouble you, my coz, on this sad occasion. Mrs. U. begs that you will be

so kind as to let Mrs. Eaton make her up two mourning caps. The only two persons who could make them at Olney lie in, or are just on the point of it. And I am in want of a pair of black shoe-buckles.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 4, 1786.

I SENT you, my dear, a melancholy letter, and I do not know that I shall now send you one very unlike it. Not that any thing occurs in consequence of our late loss more afflictive than was to be expected, but the mind does not perfectly recover its tone after a shock like that which has been felt so lately. This I observe, that though my experience has long since taught me, that this world is a world of shadows, and that it is the more prudent, as well as the more Christian course to possess the comforts that we find in it as if we possessed them not, it is no easy matter to reduce this doctrine into practice. We forget that that God who gave them, may, when He pleases, take them away; and that perhaps it may please Him to take them at a time when we least expect, or are least disposed to part from them. Thus it has happened in the present case. There never was a moment in Unwin's life, when there seemed to be more urgent want of him than the moment in which he died. He had attained to an age when, if they are at any time useful, men become useful to their families, their friends, and the world. His parish began to feel, and to be sensible of the advantages of his ministry. The clergy around him were many of them awed by his example.

His children were thriving under his own tuition and management, and his eldest boy is likely to feel his loss severely, being by his years in some respect qualified to understand the value of such a parent; by his literary proficiency too clever for a schoolboy, and too young at the same time for the university. The removal of a man in the prime of life of such a character, and with such connections, seems to make a void in society that can never be filled. God seemed to have made him just what he was, that he might be a blessing to others, and when the influence of his character and abilities began to be felt, removed him. These are mysteries, my dear, that we cannot contemplate without astonishment, but which will nevertheless be explained hereafter, and must in the mean time be revered in silence. It is well for his mother, that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne. She derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought that he lived the life, and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Albans, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more.

W. C.

TO ROBERT SMITH¹*Weston Underwood, near Olney, Dec. 9, 1786.*

MY DEAR SIR,—We have indeed suffered a great loss by the death of our friend Unwin ; and the shock that attended it was the more severe, as till within a few hours of his decease there seemed to be no very alarming symptoms. All the accounts that we received from Mr. Henry Thornton, who acted like a true friend on the occasion, and with a tenderness toward all concerned, that does him great honour, encouraged our hopes of his recovery ; and Mrs. Unwin herself found him on her arrival at Winchester so cheerful, and in appearance so likely to live that her letter also seemed to promise us all that we could wish on the subject. But an unexpected turn in his distemper, which suddenly seized his bowels, dashed all our hopes, and deprived us almost immediately of a man whom we must ever regret. His mind having been from his infancy deeply tinctured with religious sentiments, he was always impressed with a sense of the importance of the great change of all ; and on former occasions, when at any time he found himself indisposed, was consequently subject to distressing alarms and apprehensions. But in this last instance, his mind was from the first composed and easy ; his fears were taken away, and succeeded by such a resignation as warrants us in saying, ‘that God made all his bed in his sickness.’ I believe it is always thus, where the heart, though upright toward God, as Unwin’s assuredly was, is yet troubled

¹ Afterwards Lord Carrington.

with the fear of death. When death indeed comes, he is either welcome, or at least has lost his sting.

I have known many such instances; and his mother, from the moment that she learned with what tranquillity he was favoured in his illness, for that very reason expected that it would be his last. Yet not with so much certainty, but that the favourable accounts of him at length, in a great measure, superseded that persuasion.

She begs me to assure you, my dear sir, how sensible she is, as well as myself, of the kindness of your inquiries. She suffers this stroke, not with more patience and submission than I expected, for I never knew her hurried by any affliction into the loss of either, but in appearance at least, and at present, with less injury to her health than I apprehended. She observed to me, after reading your kind letter, that though it was a proof of the greatness of her loss, it yet afforded her pleasure, though a melancholy one, to see how much her son had been loved and valued by such a person as yourself.

Mrs. Unwin wrote to her daughter-in-law, to invite her and the family hither, hoping that a change of scene, and a situation so pleasant as this, may be of service to her; but we have not yet received her answer. I have good hope however that, great as her affliction must be, she will yet be able to support it, for she well knows whither to resort for consolation.

The virtues and amiable qualities of our friends are the things for which we most wish to keep them, but they are on the other hand the very things that in particular ought to reconcile us to their departure. We find ourselves sometimes connected with, and

engaged in affection too, to a person of whose readiness and fitness for another life we cannot have the highest opinion. The death of such men has a bitterness in it, both to themselves and survivors, which, thank God! is not to be found in the death of Unwin.

I know, my dear sir, how much you valued him, and I know also how much he valued you. With respect to him, all is well; and of you, if I should survive you, which perhaps is not very probable, I shall say the same.

In the mean time, believe me with the warmest wishes for your health and happiness, and with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects,—Yours, my dear sir, most faithfully,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, Dec. 9, 1786.

I AM perfectly sure that you are mistaken, though I do not wonder at it, considering the singular nature of the event, in the judgment that you form of poor Unwin's death, as it affects the interest of his intended pupil. When a tutor was wanted for him, you sought out the wisest and best man for the office within the circle of your connections. It pleased God to take him home to Himself. Men eminently wise and good are very apt to die, because they are fit to do so. You found in Unwin a man worthy to succeed him; and He, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, seeing no doubt that Unwin was ripe for a removal into a better state, removed him also. The matter viewed in this light seems not so wonderful as to

refuse all explanation, except such as in a melancholy moment you have given to it. And I am so convinced that the little boy's destiny had no influence at all in hastening the death of his tutors elect, that were it not impossible on more accounts than one that I should be able to serve him in that capacity, I would without the least fear of dying a moment the sooner, offer myself to that office; I would even do it, were I conscious of the same fitness for another and a better state, that I believe them to have been both endowed with: in that case, I perhaps might die too, but if I should, it would not be on account of that connection. Neither, my dear, had your interference in the business anything to do with the catastrophe. Your whole conduct in it must have been acceptable in the sight of God, as it was directed by principles of the purest benevolence.

I have not touched Homer to-day. Yesterday was one of my terrible seasons, and when I arose this morning, I found that I had not sufficiently recovered myself to engage in such an occupation. Having letters to write, I the more willingly gave myself a dispensation. Good night.—Yours ever,
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

Weston, Dec. 9, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We had just begun to enjoy the pleasantness of our new situation, to find at least as much comfort in it as the season of the year would permit, when affliction found us out in our retreat, and the news reached us of the death of

Mr. Unwin. He had taken a western tour with Mr. Henry Thornton, and in his return, at Winchester, was seized with a putrid fever, which sent him to his grave. He is gone to it, however, though young, as fit for it as age itself could have made him; regretted indeed, and always to be regretted by those who knew him, for he had every thing that makes a man valuable both in his principles and in his manners, but leaving still this consolation to his surviving friends, that he was desirable in this world chiefly because he was so well prepared for a better.

I find myself here situated exactly to my mind. Weston is one of the prettiest villages in England, and the walks about it at all seasons of the year delightful. I know that you will rejoice with me in the change that we have made, and for which I am altogether indebted to Lady Hesketh. It is a change as great as (to compare metropolitan things with rural) from St. Giles's to Grosvenor Square. Our house is in all respects commodious, and in some degree elegant; and I cannot give you a better idea of that which we have left, then by telling you the present candidates for it are a publican and a shoemaker.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 11, 1786.

SHENSTONE,¹ my dearest cousin, in his commentary on the vulgar adage which says, Second thoughts are best, observes that the *third* thought generally resolves itself into the *first*. Thus it has happened to me. My first thought was to effect a transposi-

¹ William Shenstone (1714-1763), poet, wrote *The Schoolmistress*, etc.

tion of the old glasses into a new frame ; my second, that perhaps both the old glasses and the new frame might be broken in the experiment ; and my third, nevertheless, to make the trial. Accordingly I walked down to Olney this day, referred the matter to the watchmaker's consideration, and he has succeeded in the attempt to a wonder. I am at this moment peering through the same medium as usual, but with the advantage of a more ornamental mounting. I conjecture, by the way, from a passage in your note that accompanied the parcel, that I am indebted not *only* to you for this new accession to my elegant accommodations, but to some kind Incognito likewise ; I beg that you will present my thanks accordingly. The clerk of the parish has made me a new pair of straps to my buckles ; and the gingerbread, by its genial warmth, has delivered me since dinner from a distension of stomach that was immoderately troublesome, so that I am the better for you, my dear, from head to foot. Long time I in vain endeavoured to make myself master of the lamp, and was obliged at last to call in William¹ to my assistance. Now there are certain things which great geniuses miss, and which men born without any understanding at all hit immediately. In justification of the truth of this remark, William, who is a lump of dough, who never can be more dead than he is till he has been buried a month, explained it to *me* in a moment ; accordingly we have used it twice, to my great satisfaction.

I sent Fuseli a hare by the coach that went up this morning, and certainly no man could better deserve it, though it was one of the largest that

¹ William Kitchener, Cowper's gardener. See Letter of 12th June 1786.

ever was seen. I could not resist the impulse that I felt to acknowledge my obligations to his critical exertions; and yet shall be sorry that I complied with it, if in consequence of my civility he should become at all less rigorous in his demands, or less severe in his animadversions. I am on the point of finishing the correction of the ninth book, which I have now adjusted to two sheets filled with his strictures. He observes at the close of them, that to execute a translation of this book in particular, with felicity, appears to him a prodigious task. He considers it, and I think justly, as one of the most consummate efforts of genius handed down to us from antiquity, and calls upon me for my utmost exertions. I have not failed to make them, with what success will be seen hereafter; but of this I am sure, that I have much improved it. The good-natured Padre¹ of the Hall has offered me, in Mrs. Throckmorton's absence, his transcribing assistance, of which I shall avail myself, and deliver over to him the book in question in a day or two.

Mr. Chester² paid me a morning visit about the middle of last week. He was, though a man naturally reserved, chatty and good humoured on the occasion, and when he took leave begged that I would not put myself to inconvenience for the sake of returning his visit with a punctilious alacrity in this wet and dirty season—an allowance for which I was obliged to him, for since we now live five miles asunder, and I never ride, it does not at present occur to me by what means I could possibly get at him.

¹ Dr. Gregson, the Roman Catholic priest.

² Of Chicheley, five miles from Olney.

Our old house is not yet tenanted, but there are candidates for it. There are two who would divide the building between them—a shoemaker and the alemonger at the Horse and Groom. The carpenter in the meantime has assured Mr. Smith,¹ the landlord, that unless it be well propped, and speedily, it will infallibly fall. Thank you, my dear, for saving our poor noddles from such imminent danger.

I learned to-day, at the Bull, that the liquors which the General has sent me I may expect to see here to-morrow; there are four hampers of sherry, and one of brandy and rum. The looking-glass which you destined to the study,—that, I mean, which came out of your chamber at the vicarage,—we have ventured to put up in the parlour. It is quite large enough, and makes a very smart appearance. The other, which you may remember to have seen in my chamber at Olney, we have transferred to Nibbs, who, being paid for a new frame, is to furnish us with a new glass for it.

What course have you taken with our friend Arnott? Has Lord Cowper discovered any intentions to perform the part of a Mæcenæ toward me, or did he leave England forgetful that there was so important a character in it as myself? His little boy, I hope, has recovered. It would grieve me if the family should lose so much generosity as seems to be included in that small bosom.

The cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away, or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at John Gilpin little

¹ Rev. Mr. Smith of Market Street (Beds.).

dream what the author sometimes suffers.—How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it!—May God bless thee, my dear! adieu.—Ever yours,
W. C.

Soon after this reaches you, we hope that you will receive a turkey. It was Mrs. Throckmorton's legacy to us when she went. It never had the honour to be crammed, for she crams none, but perhaps may not be the worse in flavour on that account. She fed it daily with her own hand.

TO WALTER CHURCHEY¹

ATTORNEY AT LAW, HAY, BRECON

Weston Underwood, near Olney, Bucks,
Dec. 13, 1786.

SIR,—I return as speedy an answer to your letter as possible, though it may seem to have been long delayed. When I told you that my time is almost totally engaged by my present undertaking, I did not at all exceed the truth. If you consider the length of the work, and the accuracy requisite to a successful performance of it, you will easily believe me.

I congratulate you on your possession of a poetical talent, which at such hours of leisure as you can win from a profession the least amusing in the world, must afford you often an agreeable entertainment. I find your versification smooth, your language correct and forcible, and especially in your translation of the *Art of Painting*. But you ask me, would I advise you to publish? I would advise every man to publish whose subjects are well

¹ See Letters of 24th December 1786.

chosen, whose sentiments are just, and who can afford to be a loser, if that should happen, by his publication. You are sensible that it is not an age in which poetry of a moral or religious tendency is likely to find many readers. But I know well that publication is necessary to give an edge to the poetical turn, and that what we produce in the closet is never a vigorous birth if we intend that it should die there. For my own part I could no more amuse myself with writing verse, if I did not print it when written, than with the study of tactics, for which I can never have any real occasion. I therefore reason thus. You are a man of business: your business is in itself dry and fatiguing: you require a relaxation of your attention: you are capable of poetical exertions: there is no employment of the mind more innocent, or as it may be managed, more beneficial to others; but the most effectual spur to industry in all such exertions is to lay the fruit of them before the public. From which premises I can draw no other conclusion than that I ought to advise you to print; especially as I understand that you have already dealt with printers, and can consequently better estimate your probability of success, than I, or any man can do it for you.

I was not willing to send you so expensive a packet by the post as I must have sent had I returned the pieces with which you have favoured me at this time. If you will be so good as to signify to me in what way you would wish to have them remitted to you, I will do accordingly. You may possibly have some friend in town through whose hands they may pass commodiously into yours.

I am much indebted to you for the obliging notice that you have taken of me in the verses that you mention: and am, sir, with much respect, your most humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 16, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The death of one whom I valued as I did Mr. Unwin, is a subject on which I could say much, and with much feeling. But habituated as my mind has been these many years to melancholy themes, I am glad to excuse myself the contemplation of them as much as possible. I will only observe, that the death of so young a man, whom I so lately saw in good health, and whose life was so desirable on every account, has something in it peculiarly distressing. I cannot think of the widow and the children that he has left, without an heartache that I remember not to have felt before. We may well say, that the ways of God are mysterious: in truth they are so, and to a degree that only such events can give us any conception of. Mrs. Unwin begs me to give her love to you, with thanks for your kind letter. Hers has been so much a life of affliction, that whatever occurs to her in that shape has not, at least, the terrors of novelty to embitter it. She is supported under this, as she has been under a thousand others, with a submission of which I never saw her deprived for a moment.

We have not been visited by a single neighbour since we came to Weston. For this however I can account easily, and without seeing the least occasion to be either grieved or offended. And to say the

truth, in my present state of mind, and with my present occupation in hand, I cannot be much concerned for it. I am often oppressed with melancholy to a degree that would make company very unwelcome, and when I am not so, still find myself engaged in a work that calls for all my time and my closest application. I do not know Mr. John Higgins even by sight, and if I have at any time passed him without showing him the civility due to so respectable a neighbour, it has been owing to no other cause. But he should recollect that it does not rest with me to commence an acquaintance. The resident inhabitants of a place must always make the first advances to a new comer, or they make a visiting intercourse impossible. It can with no propriety originate from me, and I dare say he is well aware of it.

Once, since we left Olney, I had occasion to call at our old dwelling; and never did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in for ever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt, made me think it no inapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While He dwelt in it, and manifested Himself there, he could create His own accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace; but the moment He withdraws, and takes with Him all the furniture and embellishment of His graces, it becomes what it was before He entered it—the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord, I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken.

This Babylon, however, that we have left behind us, ruinous as it is, the ceilings cracked and the walls crumbling, still finds some who covet it. A shoemaker and an alemonger have proposed themselves as joint candidates to succeed us. Some small difference between them and the landlord, on the subject of rent, has hitherto kept them out; but at last they will probably agree. In the mean time Mr. Raban prophesies its fall, and tells them that they will occupy it at the hazard of their lives, unless it be well propped before they enter it. We have not, therefore, left it much too soon; and this we knew before we migrated, though the same prophet would never speak out so long as only our heads were in danger.

I wish you well through your laborious task of transcribing. I hope the good lady's meditations are such as amuse you rather more, while you copy them, than meditations in general would;—which, for the most part, have appeared to me the most laboured, insipid, and unnatural of all productions.

Adieu, my dear friend. Thanks for very fine oysters, and an excellent cocoa-nut, received yesterday. Our love attends you both.—Ever yours,

W. C.

P.S.—Nat. Gee, with a long face, asks me if I hear any news of his dividend.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, Dec. 21, 1786.

YOUR welcome letter, my beloved cousin, which ought by the date to have arrived on Sunday, being

by some untoward accident delayed, came not till yesterday. It came however, and has relieved me from a thousand distressing apprehensions on your account.

The dew of your intelligence has refreshed my poetical laurels. A little praise now and then is very good for your hard-working poet, who is apt to grow languid, and perhaps careless without it. Praise, I find, affects us as money does. The more a man gets of it, with the more vigilance he watches over and preserves it. Such at least is its effect on me, and you may assure yourself that I will never lose a mite of it for want of care.

I have already invited the good Padre¹ in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that his kindness to Protestants has any thing insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business, I can tell him; for when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!

I should have sent you a longer letter, but was obliged to devote my last evening to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for the tombstone² of poor William, two copies of which I wrote out and enclosed, one to Henry Thornton, and one to Mr. Newton. Homer stands by me biting his thumbs, and swears that if I do not leave

¹ Dr. Gregson.

² Unwin was buried in Winchester Cathedral, where the stone may still be seen.

off directly, he will choke me with bristly Greek, that shall stick in my throat for ever.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1786.

YOU must by no means, my dearest coz, pursue the plan that has suggested itself to you on the supposed loss of your letter. In the first place I choose that my Sundays, like the Sundays of other people, shall be distinguished by something that shall make me look forward to them with agreeable expectation, and for that reason desire that they may always bring me a letter from you. In the next place, if I know when to *expect* a letter, I know likewise when to *inquire after* a letter, if it happens not to come; a circumstance of some importance, considering how excessively careless they are at the Swan, where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival at Olney. It has happened frequently to me to receive a letter long after all the rest have been delivered, and the Padre assured me that Mr. Throckmorton has sent notes three several times to Mrs. Marriot,¹ complaining of this neglect. For these reasons, my dear, thou must write still on Saturdays, and as often on other days as thou pleasest.

The screens came safe, and one of them is at this moment interposed between me and the fire, much to the comfort of my peepers. The other

¹ Hostess of the Swan at Olney.

of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be made as serviceable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones. The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Every thing is smart, every thing is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candlesticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements any thing should be left in the bottom of the purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk

pocket-handkerchiefs. There, my precious—I think I have charged thee with commissions in plenty.

You neither must nor shall deny us the pleasure of sending to you such small matters as we do. As to the partridges, you may recollect possibly, when I remind you of it, that I never eat them; they refuse to pass my stomach; and Mrs. Unwin rejoiced in receiving them only because she could pack them away to you—therefore never lay us under any embargoes of this kind, for I tell you beforehand, that we are both incorrigible. My beloved cousin, the first thing I open my eyes upon in a morning, is it not the bed in which you have laid me? Did you not, in our old dismal parlour at Olney, give me the tea on which I breakfast?—the chocolate that I drink at noon, and the table at which I dine?—the every thing, in short, that I possess in the shape of convenience, is it not all from you? and is it possible, think you, that we should either of us overlook an opportunity of making such a tiny acknowledgment of your kindness? Assure yourself that never, while my name is Giles Gingerbread, will I dishonour my glorious ancestry, and my illustrious appellation, by so unworthy a conduct. I love you at my heart, and so does Mrs. U., and we must say thank you, and send you a peppercorn when we can. So thank you, my dear, for the brawn and the chine, and for all the good things that you announce, and at present I will, for your sake, say no more of thanksgiving.

I have answered the Welshman's letter,¹ and have a hope that I shall hear no more of him.

¹ Mr. Churchey's. See 13th December 1786.

He desired my advice, whether to publish or not. In answer, I congratulated him on the possession of a poetical talent, with which he might always amuse himself when fatigued with the weightier matters of the law. As to publication, I recommended it to him by all means, as the principal incentive to exertion. And with regard to his probability of success, I told him that, as he had, I understood, already made the experiment by appearing in print, he could judge how that matter stood, better than I or any man could do it for him. What could I say, my dear? I was really unwilling to mortify a brother bard, and yet could not avoid it but at the expense of common honesty.

The Padre is to dine with us on Thursday next. I am highly pleased with him, and intend to make all possible advances to a nearer acquaintance. Why he is so silent in company I know not. Perhaps he is reserved, like some other people: or perhaps he holds it unsuitable to his function to be forward in mixed conversation. Certain it is, that he has enough to say when he and I are together. He has transcribed the ninth book for me, and is now transcribing the twelfth, which Mrs. Throckmorton left unfinished. Poor Teedon has dined with us once, and it did me good to stuff him.

We have heard from the poor widow after whom you so kindly inquire. She answered a letter of Mrs. Unwin's about a week since. Her answer was affectionate, tender, and melancholy to a great degree, but not without expressions of hope and confidence in God. We understand that she has suffered much in her health, as well as in her mind.

It could not be otherwise, for she was attached to her husband in the extreme. We have learned by a sidewind, since I mentioned her last, that Billy left every thing, or almost every thing, to the children. But she has at present one hundred pounds a year, and will have another hundred hereafter, if she outlives Mrs. U., being jointured in her estate. In the meantime, her sister lives with her, who has, I believe, determined never to marry, from which circumstance she must doubtless derive advantage. She spent some time at Clapham, after her return from Winchester, is now with Mr. John Unwin at Croydon, and goes soon to her gloomy mansion, as she calls it, in Essex. We asked her hither, in hope that a little time spent at Weston might be of use to her, but her affairs would not suffer her to come. She is greatly to be pitied; and whether she will ever recover the stroke is, I think, very uncertain.

I had some time since a very clever letter from Henry C.,¹ which I answered as well as I could, but not in kind. I seem to myself immoderately stupid on epistolary occasions, and especially when I wish to shine. Such I seem now, and such to have been ever since I began. So much the worse for you. Pray, my dear, send me a bit of Indian glue, and an almanack.

It gives me true pleasure to learn that the General at least says he is better, but it would give me much more to hear others say the same. Thank your sister for her instructions concerning the lamp, which shall be exactly followed.—I am, my dearest, your most Gingerbread Giles, etc. W^M. COWPER.

¹ Henry Cowper, son of General Cowper.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Jan. 3, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not, is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a man to be calm, who for three weeks past has been perpetually occupied in slaughter,—letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the *Iliad*, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woeful work; and were the best poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure, to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine in the mean time to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons,—First, because all the learned think so; and secondly, because I am to translate it. But were I an indifferent by-stander, perhaps I should venture to wish that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject. He has in the *Odyssey*, and I long to get at it.

I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn from certain advertisements in the *Morning Herald*, that I make a conspicuous

figure in the entertainments of Freemasons' Hall. I learn also that my volumes are out of print, and that a third edition is soon to be published. But if I am not gratified with the sight of odes composed to my honour and glory, I have at least been tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the best of men;—an unknown gentleman¹ has read my inimitable poems, and invites me to his seat in Hampshire;—another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden, and a Welsh attorney² sends me his verses to revise, and obliging asks,

‘ Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?’

If you find me a little vain hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater.

Mrs. Unwin is as much delighted as myself with our present situation. But it is a sort of April-weather life that we lead in this world. A little sunshine is generally the prelude to a storm. Hardly had we begun to enjoy the change, when the death of her son cast a gloom upon everything. He was a most exemplary man; of your order; learned, polite, and amiable. The father of lovely children, and the husband of a wife (very much like dear Mrs. Bagot) who adored him.—Adieu, my friend! Your affectionate,

W. C.

¹ Mr. Biddlecombe. See 4th Dec. 1786.

² Mr. Churchey.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 8, 1787.

I HAVE had a little nervous fever lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better to-day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, perhaps not only less alert in my manner than I usually am when my spirits are good, but rather shorter. I will however proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me, and then will do as I know you would bid me do were you here, shut up my desk, and take a walk.

The good General tells me that in the eight first books which I have sent him, he still finds alterations and amendments necessary, of which I myself am equally persuaded; and he asks my leave to lay them before an intimate friend of his, of whom he gives a character that bespeaks him highly deserving such a trust. To this I have no objection, desiring only to make the translation as perfect as I can make it. If God grant me life and health, I would spare no labour to secure that point. The General's letter is extremely kind, and both for matter and manner like all the rest of his dealings with his cousin the poet.

I had a letter also yesterday from Mr. Smith, member for Nottingham. Though we never saw each other, he writes to me in the most friendly terms, and interests himself much in my Homer, and in the success of my subscription. Speaking on this latter subject he says that my poems are read by hundreds who know nothing of my pro-

posals, and makes no doubt that they would subscribe if they did. I have myself always thought them imperfectly, or rather insufficiently, announced.

I could pity the poor woman who has been weak enough to claim my song. Such pilferings are sure to be detected. I wrote it, I know not how long, but I suppose four years ago. The Rose in question was a Rose given to Lady Austen by Mrs. Unwin, and the incident that suggested the subject occurred in the room in which you slept at the vicarage, which Lady Austen made her dining-room. Some time since, Mr. Bull going to London, I gave him a copy of it, which he undertook to convey to Nichols, the printer of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He showed it to a Mrs. C——, who begged to copy it, and promised to send it to the printer's by her servant. Three or four months afterwards, and when I had concluded it was lost, I saw it in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, with my signature, W. C. Poor simpleton! She will find now perhaps that the Rose had a thorn, and that she has pricked her fingers with it. Adieu! my beloved cousin.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 13, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It gave me pleasure, such as it was, to learn by a letter from Mr. H. Thornton, that the Inscription for the tomb of poor Unwin has been approved of. The dead have nothing to do with human praises; but if they die in the Lord, they have abundant praises to render Him; which is far better. The dead, whatever they leave behind them, have nothing to regret. Good Christians are

the only creatures in the world that are truly good ; and them they will see again, and see them improved : therefore them they regret not. Regret is for the living. What we get, we soon lose ; and what we lose, we regret. The most obvious consolation in this case seems to be, that we who regret others, shall quickly become objects of regret ourselves ; for mankind are continually passing off in a rapid succession.

I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavours to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as He pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern ; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because He did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject ; extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some

time since, to lay Homer before me, and translate for amusement. Why it pleased God that I should be hunted into such a business, of such enormous length and labour, by miseries for which He did not see good to afford me any other remedy, I know not. But so it was; and jejune as the consolation may be, and unsuited to the exigencies of a mind that once was spiritual, yet a thousand times have I been glad of it; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human mind. Let my friends, therefore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that, having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost overset me; especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge. As to fame, and honour, and glory, that may be acquired by poetical feats of any sort, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave with hope at my side, or sit with hope at my side in a dungeon all the residue of my days, I would cheerfully waive them all. For the little fame that I have already earned has never saved me from one distressing night, or from one despairing day, since I first acquired it. *For* what I am reserved, or *to* what, is a mystery; I would fain hope, not merely that I may amuse others, or only to be a translator of Homer.

Sally Perry's case has given us much concern. I have no doubt that it is distemper. But distresses

of mind, that are occasioned by distemper, are the most difficult of all to deal with. They refuse all consolation; they will hear no reason. God only, by His own immediate impressions, can remove them; as, after an experience of thirteen years' misery, I can abundantly testify.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Sunday, 14 Jan. 1787.*¹

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I have been so much indisposed in the course of the last week with the fever that I told you had seized me as not to be able to follow my last letter with another sooner, which I should otherwise certainly have done, because I know that you will feel some anxiety about me. My nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless, for waking generally about one in the morning I slept no more till toward the time when I commonly used to rise, the consequence has been, that except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the 13th book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard, therefore, to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and

¹ Southey, in error, puts Jan. 18.

I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it returns not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed.

I could now take the bark, but my stomach will not bear it, either the gross bark or the tincture. Hoffman and Duffy, and now and then a very small quantity of magnesia, are the only medicines that do not seem to poison me, and they in their turn have each of them done me service. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time, and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world. I believe, my dear, I sent you very slovenly thanks for the contents of the box and basket. If I did, it was owing partly to a cause that always prevents my being very diffuse on that topic, which is that to a heart generous and kind as yours a great deal of acknowledgment is only another word for a great deal of trouble. I now, however, repeat my thanks for all in general, and for the green cloth I give my uncle thanks in particular. Present my love to him into the bargain, and tell him that I hope he will live to give me such another piece when this shall be worn out. The leaves for fruit and the baskets are beautiful, and we shall rejoice to see them filled with raspberries, strawberries, and cherries for you. Thanks also for the neat smart almanac. And, now I am on the subject of Thanksgiving, I beg that when you shall next see or write to my namesake of Epsom, you will mention me to him with much gratitude and affection, for him alone of all my

benefactors I seem to forget, though, in fact, I do not forget him, but have the warmest sense of his kindness. I shall be happy, if it please God to spare my life till an opportunity may offer, to take him by the hand at Weston.

Mrs. Carter thinks on the subject of dreams as everybody else does, that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear (and to you I will venture to boast of it), as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that He has since ceased to do so. If you ask them why? they answer, because He has now revealed His will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that He should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts He has left us in want of nothing; but has He thereby precluded Himself in any of the operations of His Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of His interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations however of this kind are, I allow, very

rare; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them.

As to my own peculiar experience in the dreaming way I have only this to observe. I have not believed that I shall perish, because in dreams I have been told it,¹ but because I have had hardly any but terrible dreams for thirteen years, and therefore I have spent the greatest part of that time most unhappily. They have either tinged my mind with melancholy or filled it with terrors, and the effect has been unavoidable. If we swallow arsenic we must be poisoned, and he who dreams as I have done, must be troubled so much for dreams.

Tuesday.—I have always the three-cornered 'kerchiefs, and Mrs. U. will easily find a use for the odd bit, therefore will not trouble you with the muslin again.

Thanks, my dear, for the very handsome turchas² dish, which arrived safe last night.

My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind, and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left a university there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch pro-

¹ See Letter of 16th Oct. 1785.

² Turchas = turquoise.

fessors for my two volumes. His name is Rose,¹ an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it. Adieu, very affectionately,
W. C.

Shortly after the date of this letter Cowper again became deranged. This fourth derangement lasted six months.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, July 24, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—This is the first time I have written these six months, and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour at least to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me; in my present state of mind I taste nothing; nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have therefore read Burns's poems,² and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is I believe the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare,

¹ Samuel Rose, soon to become one of Cowper's most valued friends.

² About the time that Cowper was reading Burns, Burns was reading Cowper. Burns used often to carry *The Task* in his pocket. To Mrs Dunlop he writes: 'How do you like Cowper? Is not *The Task* a glorious poem? The religion of *The Task*, baiting a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and nature: the religion that exalts, that ennobles men.'

(I should rather say since Prior,) who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel. He who can command admiration, dishonours himself if he aims no higher than to raise a laugh.

I am, dear sir, with my best wishes for your prosperity, and with Mrs. Unwin's respects,—Your obliged and affectionate humble servant, W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Aug. 27, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—I have not yet taken up the pen again, except to write to you. The little taste that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years; that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard, as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me, will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably

improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,—is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle. The only mercy that I show myself in this respect is that I read nothing that requires much closeness of application. I lately finished the perusal of a book, which in former years I have more than once attacked, but never till now conquered; some other book always interfered before I could finish it. The work I mean is Barclay's¹ *Argenis*; and if ever you allow yourself to read for mere amusement, I can recommend it to you (provided you have not already perused it) as the most amusing romance that ever was written. It is the only one indeed of an old date that I ever had the patience to go through with. It is interesting in a high degree; richer in incident than can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free from all entanglement and confusion. The style too appears to me to be such as would not dishonour Tacitus himself.

Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country through our ignorance of his language.

¹ John Barclay (1582-1621). His *Argenis* is a Latin satire containing clever allusions to the state of France during the time of the League.

I despair of meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern. I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine; but his uncouth dialect spoiled all; and before he had half read him through he was quite *ram-feezled*.
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Aug. 30, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Though it costs me something to write, it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are why you especially should not be neglected,—no neighbour indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope, an inmate.

My health and spirits seem to be mending daily; to what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness: I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends, than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his ground, has now given me possession of his library; an acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my

own. By his means I have been so well supplied that I have not yet even looked at the *Lounger*, for which however I do not forget that I am obliged to you. *His* turn comes next, and I shall probably begin him to-morrow.

Mr. George Throckmorton is at the Hall. I thought I had known these brothers long enough to have found out all their talents and accomplishments; but I was mistaken. The day before yesterday, after having walked with us, they *carried* us up to the library, (a more accurate writer would have said *conducted* us), and then they showed me the contents of an immense portfolio, the work of their own hands. It was furnished with drawings of the architectural kind, executed in a most masterly manner, and, among others, contained outside and inside views of the Pantheon,—I mean the Roman one. They were all, I believe, made at Rome. Some men may be estimated at a first interview, but the Throckmortons must be seen often, and known long, before one can understand all their value.

They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this autumn. I answer, Yes; and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you. We were disappointed that we had no letter from you this morning. You will find me coated and buttoned according to your recommendation.

I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees. Mrs. Unwin begs to be affectionately remembered to you. She is in tolerable health, which is the chief

comfort here that I have to boast of.—Yours, my
dearest cousin, as ever, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 4, 1787.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Come when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future.

Mr. G.¹ is here, Mrs. Throckmorton's uncle. He is lately arrived from Italy, where he has resided several years, and is so much the gentleman, that it is impossible to be more so; sensible, polite, obliging; slender in his figure, and in manners most engaging,—every way worthy to be related to the Throckmortons.

I have read Savary's *Travels into Egypt*;²

¹ Gifford.

² Nicholas Savary (1750-1788). His *Lettres sur l'Égypte* was translated into English 1786-7. 2 vols. 8vo.

Mémoires of Baron de Tott;¹ Fenn's *Original Letters*;² *The Letters of Frederic of Bohemia*;³ and am now reading *Mémoires d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*.⁴ I have also read Barclay's *Argenis*, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All these, together with Madan's *Letters to Priestley*,⁵ and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 8, 1787.

I CONTINUE to write, as you perceive, my dearest cousin, though, in compassion for my pate, you advised me for the present to abstain:—in reality I have no need, at least I believe not, of any such caution. Those jarrings that made my scull feel like a broken egg-shell, and those twirls that I spoke of, have been removed by an infusion of the

¹ Baron François de Tott (1733-93), son of a Hungarian nobleman, for many years in the service of the Porte. His work *Mémoires sur les Turcs et Tartares* appeared at Amsterdam in 1784. English versions of it appeared in London (1785), Dublin (1785), and London (1786). See Cowper's letter of 29 Sept. 1787.

² Sir John Fenn (1739-1794) edited *Original Letters of the Reign of Henry VI.*, etc., 1787-1823. These are now known as the *Paston Letters*.

³ *Frederic of Bohemia*. The Editor can only trace the following book, which certainly Cowper never saw:—*Letters to King James VI. from the Queen, Prince Charles, the Princess Elizabeth, and her husband, Frederick, King of Bohemia*. Edited from the originals in the Faculty of Advocates. Published by the Maitland Club, 1835.

⁴ Henri II. of Lorraine, Duke of Guise (1614-64). His *Mémoires* were issued in 1661, Englished in 1669, under the title—*Les Mémoires de Feu Monsieur le Duc de Guise*. Paris, 1668; Cologne, 1669. *Les Mémoires d'Henry de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*. Paris 1681. Henry II. of Lorraine, fifth of Guise, was the son of Charles of Lorraine, Duke of Guise.

⁵ Madan's *Letters to Joseph Priestley*. London, 1787.

bark, which I have of late constantly applied to. I was blooded indeed, but to no purpose; for the whole complaint was owing to relaxation. But the apothecary recommended phlebotomy, in order to ascertain that matter; wisely suggesting that if I found no relief from bleeding, it would be a sufficient proof that weakness must necessarily be the cause. It is well when the head is chargeable with no weakness but what may be cured by an astringent.

Thanks to your choice, I wear the most elegant buttons in all this country; they have been much admired at the Hall. When my waistcoat is made I shall be quite accomplished. You have made us both happy by giving us a nearer prospect of your arrival. But Mrs. Unwin says you must not fix an early day for your departure, nor talk of staying only two or three weeks, because it will be a thorn that she shall lean upon all the time that you are here; and so say I. It is a comfort to be informed when a visitor will go whom we wish to be rid of, but the reverse of a comfort, my cousin, when you are in the question.

Your last letter to Mrs. U. never came to hand; and as to the bed, it is so long since you supposed it sent that I fear it is altogether lost. You never mentioned it in any of your letters, therefore we did not look for it; its non-arrival would otherwise have been noticed. It is possible, however, that either the upholsterer, or the book-keeper at the inn, or the waggoner, may be able to give us some tidings of it. Woe be to them, careless knaves! if they have lost it among them!

The Throcks, as you observe, are Foxites; but

their moderation in party matters is such, that in all the interviews we have had this summer, the string of politics has never been touched. Upon recollection, I must except a single instance, in which Peter Pindar,¹ whose last piece Mr. Throckmorton lent me, furnished the occasion. But even then, though I took the opportunity of speaking my mind of that licentious lampooner of dignities very freely, we had no dispute. It was agreed on all hands to be great pity, considering the ill effect of such political ribaldry on the minds of the multitude, that the court has not stopped his mouth with a bribe;—nobody doubted that he would open it wide enough for the reception of a large one. How contemptible is wit so miserably misemployed!

I admire as much as you the spirit of our young minister. The Emperor and Pitt seem to be the two greatest names of the present age. They are both at present in circumstances that give them a noble opportunity to display their address, and we shall soon see how they will acquit themselves. If they can manage their respective difficulties without bloodshed, they will each deserve a statue. I entirely agree with you that the ardour of youth under the control of wisdom, are the two essentials to make a good minister. Were the old Duke of Newcastle now at the helm, the French party in Holland would carry all before them, and the French court would pull us by the nose. Sir Thomas, therefore, was right in his opinion, as indeed he generally was,—and in political matters, I believe, always.

¹ Dr. John Wolcot (1738-1819).

Our neighbours rejoice that you are coming, and desire me to tell you so. Mrs. Throckmorton walked with us yesterday morning to gather mushrooms.

We send you two brace of partridges;—one brace from them, and one brace a present from Mr. John Higgins.¹—With Mrs. U.'s affectionate respects, yours, my dear, ever, WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 15, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—The partridges that you received on Monday were from us. The others which you received, as we suppose, on Tuesday or Wednesday, were from the Throcks immediately. They did not communicate their sending any to us till after the parcel was gone. And alas! they are now gone themselves. Gone into Staffordshire on a visit to her brother, and are not to be expected here again in less than a month. They set off this morning. Mrs. Throck. regretted last night that they had no gamekeeper, because, for that reason, they could not furnish us with game in their absence. We have indeed lived there lately, and to such a degree that Mrs. Unwin told Mrs. Throck. she had better take us to board at once. They have generally drunk tea with us twice a week, and all the other days we have either dined or drunk tea with them.

On Monday last I was invited to meet your friend Miss Jekyll at the Hall, and there we found her. Her good nature, her humorous manner, and

¹ A Weston neighbour.

her good sense are charming, insomuch that even I, who was never much addicted to speech-making, and who at present find myself particularly indisposed to it, could not help saying at parting, I am glad that I have seen you, and sorry that I have seen so little of you. We were sometimes many in company; on Thursday we were fifteen, but we had not altogether so much vivacity and cleverness as Miss Jekyll, whose talent at mirth-making has this rare property to recommend it that nobody suffers by it.

We have this day been inquiring after the lost bedstead. We sent Sam to Olney, with orders if he found not John Rogers there to proceed to Sherrington in quest of him. But at Olney he was informed that on this day (Saturday) he always goes to Northampton. On Monday, however, we shall be sure to find him at Olney, when the proper inquiries shall be made. The waggoners, in the meantime, whom Samuel actually saw and conversed with about it, declare that they have no remembrance of any such thing having at any time been sent to their inn in London. We are on the whole rather inclined at present to suspect that the fault must lie with the upholsterer.

A thousand thanks, my dear, for my waistcoat, which I wore the last time I dined at the Hall, to the great admiration of the ladies. It is perfectly genteel and elegant.

I am making a gravel walk for winter use, under a warm hedge in the orchard. It shall be furnished with a low seat for your accommodation, and if you do but like it I shall be satisfied. In wet weather, or rather after wet weather, when the

street is dirty, it will suit you well, for, lying on an easy declivity, through its whole length, it must of course be immediately dry.

Mrs. Throck. has just made a pheasantry where some shrubs grew, which you may remember, on the south side of the court. She has ordered the smith to make a key for me. You observe, my dear, that I have everything at Weston that £3000 a year would procure me. And for being at Weston I am indebted to you.

I have just been writing a longish letter, an author's letter, and consequently rather a formal one, to Mr. Mackenzie at Edinburgh,¹ in answer to his which you sent me. If I ever get it again I will show it you, but last night Mrs. Throck., who drank tea here alone walked away with it, that she might show it to her husband, and I have heard no tidings of it since.

Mrs. Unwin bids me say that your injunctions on the articles of coals and beer shall be obeyed, and she also charges me with her most affectionate compliments. We talk much and often about you, and you are very much wished for by our friends at the Hall; how much by me I will not tell you till the second week in October.—Yours,
my dear, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 20, 1787.

FOR the more effectual abatement of your furious ire, my dearest coz, on the subject of these same partridges, it is expedient you should be told that

¹ Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831), author of *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and innumerable papers in the *Mirror* and *Lounger*.

we sent you only a *part* of the last present of that sort which we received from the Hall. Know also that when we find ourselves disposed to stew or to pot, we have an abundant supply of pigeons for those purposes from our neighbour's dove-cote, Mrs. Throck. having given us the use of it at discretion. I know not by what coach they sent the basket which you never received, but I suppose by the Northampton coach. That it *was* sent is certain, and when I answer a letter which I expect to receive from our fair neighbour soon, (for she has promised to write to us,) I will thank her on your behalf.

Rogers the great has himself at last been spoken with about the bedstead. He expressed much concern for the loss of it, but at the same time was pretty positive that no such *meuble* had ever been conveyed to his warehouse in St. John Street. He thinks it must have been carried to some other inn, but promises to make inquiry when he goes next to London.

Miss Jekyll informed me that a conjugal connexion between herself and the Rev Mr. * * * * * having been proposed by * * * * * , she held it advisable to mention the matter to me, that if I had any influence with that gentleman, I might employ it for the promotion of so desirable a purpose. I replied that she was the most fortunate of women in having directed her application in that instance to me, for that I had stronger interest with him than any body. I learned in the course of our conversation on the subject that she was principally enamoured of his *house*, for himself she had never seen. He does not visit at the Hall, and how it has happened that he does not I have never been able to

learn, for of all the neighbouring clergy, he is in that respect almost a singular exception, it is an exception, however, that renders my interposition on the occasion the more expedient; and certain it is that for whatsoever name she should exchange her own, if the consequence might be her approximation to us, we should rejoice in it. He sent us yesterday a present of the finest perch that I have seen these seven years.

I read with much pleasure, my dear cousin, the account that you give of my uncle, his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age, to have those with him whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is of being amused. Longevity, that in general either deprives a man of his friends, or if not of the power of enjoying their conversation, deals with *him* more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable. May he long continue to possess them! I acquiesce entirely in the justness of your reasoning on this subject, and must need confess that were I your father, I should with great reluctance resign you to the demands of any cousin in the world. I shall be happy to see you, my dear, yet once again, but not till I can enjoy that happiness without the violation of any proprieties on your part,—not till he can spare you. Give my love to him, and tell him that I am not so much younger than he is, now, as I was when I saw him last. As years proceed, the difference between the elder and the younger is gradually reduced to nothing. But you will come; and in the mean

time the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you; to whom may be added a third sort,—ourselves for instance, who are of neither of those descriptions. Mrs. Unwin bids me present her love to you in the most affectionate terms, and says, Pray tell Lady Hesketh that all our featherbeds are used by turns.

I rejoice that Bully is so merry, and long to see him. Remember me kindly to Jocky. The *Marquis* is dead, and is succeeded by a *Beau*.—I received a letter yesterday, enclosing a Bank-note, and copy it for your edification:—

SIR,—A friend of yours, hearing where you reside, begs your acceptance of a ten pound note.—I am,
sir, &c.

Est-ce par hazard le Monsieur Dalling dont vous m'avez jadis fait le récit ?

Yours, my beloved cousin,—WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston Underwood, Sept. 22, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Not well, but better. I take an early opportunity to tell you that I am so. Perhaps I might have sent you a more satisfactory account of myself, had I postponed my letter yet a season; but Mrs. Unwin having engaged for me that I should write to you *myself* as soon as I should find myself able to do so, and my inclination prompting me to do it likewise, here I am. When I saw you I could not speak to you; now I can write to you, an alteration at least so much for the better as will serve to gratify the kindness of your

feelings for me, and therefore you have a right to know it.

It would be better with me than it is, were I capable of resuming my occupation in the plains of Troy. But at present I do not feel myself free for that service. In the last year I seem to have lived twenty years. While I was busied in that work I seemed secure of bringing it to a conclusion. At the present moment life appears so short as not to afford me half scope enough for the undertaking. If my views in this respect should alter, I shall return to my work with pleasure, and in the mean time instead of producing anything myself, must have recourse for amusement to the works of others. So it fares with mankind in general. We have not judgment or strength of mind for an arduous enterprise till two thirds of our allotted time are spent, and then, if through any infirmity of mind or body we happen to be thrown back, the remainder is too short to allow the hope of recovering the ground that we have lost. To reach the goal a man must have eyes to see it; but as for me I have no prospect.

WM. COWPER

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 29, 1787.

MY DEAR COZ,—I thank you for your political intelligence; retired as we are, and seemingly excluded from the world, we are not indifferent to what passes in it; on the contrary, the arrival of a newspaper at the present juncture, never fails to furnish us with a theme for discussion, short indeed but satisfactory, for we seldom differ in opinion.

I have received such an impression of the Turks

from the memoirs of Baron de Tott, which I read lately, that I can hardly help presaging the conquest of that empire by the Russians. The disciples of Mahomet are such babies in modern tactics, and so enervated by the use of their favourite drug; so fatally secure in their predestinarian dream, and so prone to a spirit of mutiny against their leaders, that nothing less can be expected. In fact, they had not been their own masters at this day had but the Russians known the weakness of their enemies half so well as they undoubtedly know it now. Add to this, that there is a popular prophecy current in both countries, that Turkey is one day to fall under the Russian sceptre. A prophecy which, from whatever authority it be derived, as it will naturally encourage the Russians and dispirit the Turks, in exact proportion to the degree of credit it has obtained on both sides, has a direct tendency to effect its own accomplishment. In the mean time, if I wish them conquered, it is only because I think it will be a blessing to them to be governed by any other hand than their own. For under heaven has there never been a throne so execrably tyrannical as theirs. The heads of the innocent that have been cut off to gratify the humour or caprice of their tyrants, could they be all collected and discharged against the walls of their city, would not leave one stone on another.

O that you were here this beautiful day! It is too fine by half to be spent in London. I have a perpetual din in my head, and, though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice, nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love. Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Weston Underwood, Oct. 2, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—After a long but necessary interruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect, at least, better qualified for it than before; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the most interesting subjects, releases me however from the disagreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days, while in fact you are not that friend, but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation;—a charge from which, in that state of mind and under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burthen. Still, indeed, it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you—that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds in part, promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has

been. The storms that have assailed me would have over-set the faith of every man that ever had any; and the very remembrance of them, even after they have been long passed by, makes hope impossible.

Mrs. Unwin, whose poor bark is still held together, though shattered by being tossed and agitated so long at the side of mine, does not forget yours and Mrs. Newton's kindness on this last occasion. Mrs. Newton's offer to come to her assistance, and your readiness to have rendered us the same service, could you have hoped for any salutary effect of your presence, neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself undervalue, nor shall presently forget. But you judged right when you supposed, that even your company would have been no relief to me; the company of my father or my brother, could they have returned from the dead to visit me, would have been none to me.

We are busied in preparing for the reception of Lady Hesketh, whom we expect here shortly. We have beds to put up, and furniture for beds to make; workmen, and scouring, and bustle. Mrs. Unwin's time has, of course, been lately occupied to a degree that made writing to her impracticable; and she excused herself the rather, knowing my intentions to take her office. It does not, however, suit me to write much at a time. This last tempest has left my nerves in a worse condition than it found them; my head, especially, though better informed, is more infirm than ever. I will, therefore, only add our joint love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, and that I am, my dear friend, Your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Oct. 5, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—My uncle's commendation of my hand-writing was the more agreeable to me, as I have seldom received any on that subject. I write generally in the helter-skelter way, concerning myself about nothing more than to be legible. I am sorry for his deafness, which I hope, however, by this time the doctor and the doctor's engine have removed. It is well if he is cheerful under that malady, which oppresses the spirits of most men more than any other disorder that is not accompanied with pain. We have but few senses, and can spare none of them without much inconvenience. But I know that when my uncle's spirits are good, they are proof against all oppression.

Mrs. Throck. has not written to me, and now will not. Mr. Gregson¹ had a letter from one of them to-day, in which they send compliments to us, and tell us they will be at home on Tuesday. How should she find time to write to me, who has been visiting her brother, one of the gayest young men in the world, who is building a great house, and has one of the finest pieces of water in England, with thirty boats on it? I am sorry to hear that his youth, and his riches together, bid fair to ruin him,—that he is a prey to his neighbours, plays deep, and consequently cannot be rich long. Excessive good-nature is a quality attended with so much danger to a young man, that, amiable as it is, one cannot help pitying the man that owns it.

¹ The Roman Catholic priest at the Hall.

Mrs. Chester¹ paid her first visit here last Saturday, a prelude, no doubt, to the visit that she intends to you. I was angry with her for her omission of a civility to which you are so highly entitled; but now that she discovers symptoms of repentance, feel myself inclined to pardon her. She is one of those women, indeed, to whom one pardons everything the moment they appear,—not handsome, but showing a gentleness in her countenance, voice, and manner, that speaks irresistibly in her favour.

Your newspaper, for which I thank you, my cousin, pleases me more than any that I have seen lately. The pertness of the *Herald* is my detestation, yet I always read it; and why? because it is a newspaper, and should therefore doubtless read it were it ten times more disgusting than it is. Fielding was the only man who ever attempted to be witty with success in a newspaper, and even he could not support it long. But he led the way in his *Covent Garden Journal*, and a thousand block-heads have followed him. I am not pleased, however, with that furious attack upon the poor Abbé Mann. The zealous Protestant who makes it, discovers too much of that spirit which he charges upon the Papists. The poor Abbé's narrative was in a manner extorted from him; and when I read it, instead of finding it insidious and hostile to the interests of the Church of England, I was foolish enough to think it discreet, modest, temperate. The gentleman, therefore, has either more zeal, or a better nose at a plot, than I have.

The bedstead, my dear, suffered nothing by the

¹ Of Chicheley.

long delay and the bad lodging that it met with: it could not have looked better than it does had it arrived at the time intended. It lost a screw indeed; but our neighbour the tailor happening to have an odd one exactly of the right size, supplied the deficiency. It will have its furniture to-morrow.

Poor Teedon,¹ whom I dare say you remember, has never missed calling here once, and generally twice, a week since January last. The poor man has gratitude if he has not wit, and in the possession of that one good quality has a sufficient recommendation. I blame myself often for finding him tiresome, but cannot help it. My only comfort is that I should be more weary of thousands who have all the cleverness that has been denied to Teedon.

I have been reading Hanway's² *Travels*, and of course the history of Nadir Shah,³ alias Kouli Khan—a hero! my dear,—and I am old enough to remember the time when he was accounted one. He built up pyramids of human heads, and had consequently many admirers. But he has found few, I imagine, in the world to which he is gone to give an account of his building. I have now just entered upon Baker's *Chronicle*,⁴ having never seen it in my life till I found it in the Hall library. It is a book at which you and I should have laughed immoderately, some years

¹ See footnote to Letter to Rev. John Newton, Aug. 1780.

² Jonas Hanway (1712-1786) published *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea; with a Journal of Travels from London through Russia into Persia, and back again through Russia, Germany, and Holland*. London, 1753.

³ Of Persia, the Conqueror. Born 1688, assassinated 1747.

⁴ Sir Richard Baker (1568-1645). Wrote *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, often referred to by Sir Roger de Coverley.

ago. It is equally wise and foolish, which makes the most ridiculous mixture in the world.

With Mrs. U.'s affectionate respects, my dearest cousin,—I am ever yours, WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Oct. 19, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—A summons from Johnson, which I received yesterday, calls my attention once more to the business of translation. Before I begin I am willing to catch though but a short opportunity to acknowledge your last favour. The necessity of applying myself with all diligence to long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future.

Air and exercise are necessary to all men, but particularly so to the man whose mind labours; and to him who has been all his life accustomed to much of both, they are necessary in the extreme. My time since we parted has been devoted entirely to the recovery of health and strength for this service, and I am willing to hope with good effect. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts; I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me.

You find yourself, I hope, by this time as comfortably situated in your new abode, as in a new abode one can be. I enter perfectly into all your feelings on occasion of the change. A sensible mind cannot do violence even to a local attachment without much pain. When my father died I was

young, too young to have reflected much. He was Rector of Berkhamstead, and there I was born. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then and not till then, I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 20, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My indisposition could not be of a worse kind. Had I been afflicted with a fever, or confined by a broken bone, neither of these cases would have made it impossible that we should meet. I am truly sorry that the impediment was insurmountable while it lasted, for such in fact it was. The sight of any face except Mrs. Unwin's was to me an insupportable grievance; and when it has happened that by *forcing* himself into my hiding-place, some friend has found me out, he has had no great cause to exult in his success, as Mr. Bull can tell you. From this dreadful condition of mind I emerged suddenly; so suddenly, that Mrs. Unwin, having no notice of such a change

herself, could give none to any body; and when it obtained, how long it might last, or how far it was to be depended on, was a matter of the greatest uncertainty. It affects me on the recollection with the more concern, because I learn from your last, that I have not only lost an interview with you myself, but have stood in the way of visits that you would have gladly paid to others, and who would have been happy to have seen you. You should have forgotten, (but you are not good at forgetting your friends,) that such a creature as myself existed.

It has happened indeed, and by means that it was not possible for us to prevent, that our chambers have not had beds in them till within this fortnight. Lady Hesketh undertook to furnish them for us, and by a strange blunder of the people at the inn, or of the waggoner, the materials that she sent for the purpose, remained almost a twelve-month in the warehouse. She ordered them hither without mentioning that she had done it in any of her letters to Mrs. Unwin, who wondered indeed that they did not come, but could not decently take any notice of their non-arrival.

I rejoice that Mrs. Cowper has been so comfortably supported. She must have severely felt the loss of her son. She has an affectionate heart toward her children, and could not but be sensible of the bitterness of such a cup. But God's presence sweetens every bitter. Desertion is the only evil that a Christian cannot bear.

I have done a deed for which I find some people thank me little. Perhaps I have only burned my fingers, and had better not have meddled. Last

Sunday se'nnight I drew up a petition to Lord Dartmouth, in behalf of Mr. Postlethwaite.¹ We signed it, and all the principal inhabitants of Weston followed our example. What we had done was soon known in Olney, and an evening or two ago, Mr. Raban called here, to inform me (for that seemed to be his errand,) how little the measure that I had taken was relished by some of his neighbours. I vindicated my proceeding on the principles of justice and mercy to a laborious and well-deserving minister, to whom I had the satisfaction to find that none could allege one serious objection, and that all, except one, who objected at all, are persons who in reality ought to have no vote upon such a question. The affair seems still to remain undecided. If his Lordship waits, which I a little suspect, till his steward shall have taken the sense of those with whom he is likely to converse upon the subject, and means to be determined by his report, Mr. Postlethwaite's case is desperate.

I beg that you will remember me affectionately to Mr. Bacon. We rejoice in Mrs. Newton's amended health, and when we can hear that she is restored, shall rejoice still more. The next summer may prove more propitious to us than the past: if it should, we shall be happy to receive you and yours. Mrs. Unwin unites with me in love to you all three. She is tolerably well, and her writing was prevented by nothing but her expectation that I should soon do it myself.—Ever yours,

W. C.

¹ Curate of Olney.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Saturday, Oct. 27, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Now that there is something like a time appointed, I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away; November is just at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then, no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more,—a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will I doubt not spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you; and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not indifferent. For this and for many other reasons I ardently wish that he may enjoy and long enjoy the present measure of health, with which he is favoured. Our wants are included within the compass of two items. *I* want a watch-string, and we *both* are in want of certain things, called candle-ends, but of wax, not *tallow-fats*. Those with which you furnished us at Olney are not quite expended indeed, but are drawing near to their dissolution. Should I after farther scrutiny discover any other deficiencies, you shall know them.

You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage again in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly *in statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I

shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labours, are articles in my account of such extreme uncertainty, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment *essential* to my present well-being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations, had he waking and sleeping dreamt as I do, I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labours; for I compliment myself with a persuasion that I have more heroic valour, of the passive kind at least, than he had,—perhaps than any man; it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise.

By some accident or other it comes to pass that I see the Throckmortons daily. Yesterday, soon after I had received your letter, I met them armed with bow and arrows, going to practise at the target in the garden. I consulted them on the subject of the best road from Newport hither, and the prevailing opinion was in favour of the road through Emberton. It is rough, indeed, but not so heavy as the road by Gayhurst. Mrs. Throck., anxious to put the matter past all doubt, cut a caper on the grass-plot, and said she would go ride to Olney immediately on purpose to examine the road. If her report contains anything material, you shall hear it.

By *their* means I hear of Mrs. Wrighte¹ daily. Their account of her yesterday was, that she begins to eat, and is somewhat more recollected. Dr. Kerr, I believe, is *now* pretty confident of her recovery. But it has been a terrible malady.

¹ Of Gayhurst.

I rejoice, my dear, that you have such a Cadwallader. Silent and sober is exactly the character of our household; we shall be as harmonious as anything so noiseless can be.

I thank you for the Prologue. There are, as you say, some good lines in it; and *so* good, that it is pity they have not a better ending. But the distinction between *Praise* and *Applause*, is too fine for an ordinary apprehension.

In a letter that I received yesterday from the General, he tells me that my MSS. are all safe: a piece of intelligence that refreshed me much. For missing some books that I did not remember to have sent, I began to be in no small *quandary*. I expect in a few days the old box brimful of heroics.

Farewell, my dearest coz.! the month that you speak of will be short indeed, unless you can contrive to lengthen it.—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 3, 1787.

SUFFER not thyself, my dearest coz., to be seduced from thy purpose. There are those among thy friends and kindred who being covetous of thy company will endeavour to keep thee near them, and the better to effect their machinations, will possess thee, if they can, with many megrims concerning the roads and the season of the year. But heed them not. They only do what I should do myself were I in their predicament, who certainly should not fail, for my own sake, to represent your intended journey as an enterprise rather to be

admired than approved—more bold than prudent. The turnpike, as you well know, will facilitate your progress every inch of the way till you come to Sherrington, and from Sherrington hither you will find the way equally safe, though undoubtedly a little rough. Rough it was when you were here, such it is still, but not rougher than then, nor will it be so. The reason is this—that the soil being naturally a rock is very little, or rather not at all, affected by the season, for as thou well knowest, no showers will melt a stone. The distance also from Sherrington toll-gate to our door is but four miles and a quarter. The only reason why I do not recommend the back road rather than this, is because it is apt to be heavy; in other respects it deserves the preference, for it is just as safe as the other, and from the turning at Gayhurst, is shorter than that by a mile and a half. The Throcks travel them both continually, and so do all the chaises and coaches in the country, and I never heard of an accident to any of them in all the twenty years that I have lived in it. Mr. and Mrs. Throck., understanding that you are a little apprehensive on this subject, begged me yesterday evening to tell you that *they* will send their servant to meet you at Newport, who will direct your *cocher* to all the best and most commodious quarters. As to the season of the year, I grant that it is November. It would be but folly to deny it. But what then?—Does not the sun shine in November? One would imagine that it did not, could not, or would not, were we to listen only to the suggestions of certain persons. But, my dear, the matter is far otherwise; nay it is even just the reverse; for he not only shines, but

with such splendour too, that I write at this moment in a room heated by his beams, and with the curtain at my side let down on purpose to abate their fervour. Then let November have its just praise, and let not my cousin fear to find the country pleasant even now. I have said it in verse, and I think it in prose, that as it is at all times preferable to the town, so it is especially preferable in winter, provided I mean that you have gravel to walk upon, of which there is no scarcity at Weston.

Coming home from my walk yesterday I met Mr. Throck., on his return from Gayhurst. I was glad that I had so good an opportunity to inform myself concerning Mrs. Wrighte. His account of her was in some respects favourable, but upon the whole not flattering. She eats, it is true, and knows those about her; but she almost keeps her bed, is torpid, and inattentive to all that passes, and can hardly be prevailed with to speak, unless constrained to it. Dr. Kerr professes himself perfectly master of her case, but I have more than once heard some wonder expressed that they have not called in other assistance. The present is an unfortunate period in that family: three or four days since, Mr. Wrighte had a terrible fall from his horse. He was fox-hunting; and in Yardley Chase, the hounds chose to follow the deer. He rode violently to whip them off, when his horse plunged into a slough, pitched him over his head, and fell upon him. The softness of the ground saved him, but he was much hurt in both shoulders, and is now suffering by a fit of the gout, which the fall has brought upon him. Mr. Throck. and Mrs. Throck.'s brother, who is now at the hall, happened

to see him thrown, and very humanely assisted him to mount again, which without their help he could never have done. The rest of the company were too much fox-hunters to trouble themselves at all about him.

Many thanks, my dear cousin, both on Mrs. Unwin's part and mine for the gown you have purchased for her. She is even now proud of it, and will be prouder still when she shall put it on. I shall be glad of the paper; not that I am in immediate want, but it is good to be provided. I shall put the fourteenth *Iliad* into Mrs. Throck.'s hands in a day or two; I am at present only employed by blots and obliterations in making it more difficult for her to decipher.

Adieu, my dear. Our best love, and best wishes are always with you.—Yours affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

I hear of three prints lately published. Two of Crazy Kate, and one of the Lacemaker in 'Truth.' Mr. Wm. Throckmorton has said that he will send them to me.

I rejoice that we have peace, at least a respite from war. But you do well to suspect the French of a double meaning, or even of a treble one if that be possible. I believe they mean nothing so little, as to be honest.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 10, 1787.

THE parliament, my dearest cousin, prorogued continually, is a meteor dancing before my eyes,

promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope, however, that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have never forgotten (I never say forgot) to tell you the reason why Mr. Bull did not fulfil his engagement to call on you on his return from the West. It was owing to an accident that happened to one of those legs of his. At Exmouth he chose to wallow in the sea and made use of a bathing machine for that purpose. It has a ladder, as you know, attached to its tail. On the lowermost step of that ladder he stood, when it broke under him. He fell of course, and with his knee on the point of a large nail which pierced it almost to the depth of two inches. The consequence was that when he reached London he could think of nothing but getting home as fast as possible. The wound has been healed some time but is occasionally still painful, so that he is not without apprehensions that it may open again, which, considering that he is somewhat gross in his habit, is not impossible. But I have just sent to invite him to dine with us on Monday.

I have a kitten, my dear, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible if they could. She tumbles head over heels several times together, she lays her cheek to the ground and presents her rump at you with an air of most supreme disdain, from this posture she rises to dance

on her hind feet, an exercise that she performs with all the grace imaginable, and she closes these various exhibitions with a loud smack of her lips, which, for want of greater propriety of expression, we call spitting. But though all cats spit, no cat ever produced such a sound as she does. In point of size she is likely to be a kitten always, being extremely small of her age, but time I suppose, that spoils everything, will make her also a cat. You will see her I hope before that melancholy period shall arrive, for no wisdom that she may gain by experience and reflection hereafter, will compensate the loss of her present hilarity. She is dressed in a tortoise-shell suit, and I know that you will delight in her.

Mrs. Throckmorton carries us to-morrow in her chaise to Chicheley.

Mr. Chester has been often here, and Mrs. Chester, as I told you, once; and we are glad and obliged to our neighbours for an opportunity to return their visits, at once so convenient and inviting. The event, however, must be supposed to depend on elements, at least on the state of the atmosphere, which is turbulent beyond measure. Yesterday it thundered, last night it lightened, and at three this morning I saw the sky as red as a city in flames could have made it. I have a leech in a bottle, my dear, that foretells all these prodigies and convulsions of nature: no, not as you will naturally conjecture by articulate utterance of oracular notices, but by a variety of gesticulations, which here I have not room to give an account of. Suffice it to say, that no change of weather surprises him, and that in point of the earliest and most accurate intelli-

gence, he is worth all the barometers in the world. None of them all indeed can make the least pretence to foretell thunder—a species of capacity of which he has given the most unequivocal evidence. I gave but sixpence for him, which is a groat more than the market price, though he is in fact, or rather would be, if leeches were not found in every ditch, an invaluable acquisition.

Mrs. Throck. *sola* dined with us last Tuesday. She invited herself; the particular reason of her so doing was that her husband and brother dined at Horton.¹ The next day we dined at the Hall.

Mrs. Wrighte's² is still considered as a melancholy case, though we learn this evening that she has twice or thrice taken airings in the chaise, and must therefore I suppose be better. Pray, my dear, add to what I have already desired you to bring with you, a roll or two of green wax candle to go upon a spindle, spindle, spindle. I repeat it three times, having more than once experienced how apt that circumstance is to escape the memory. I have no room for any other addition than that of our best love, and to assure you how truly I am ever yours,
WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 16, 1787.

I THANK you for the solicitude that you express on the subject of my present studies. The work is undoubtedly long and laborious, but it has an end, and proceeding leisurely, with a due attention to the use of air and exercise, it is possible that I may

¹ Five miles from Olney.

² Of Gayhurst.

live to finish it. Assure yourself of one thing, that though to a bystander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and, at present, not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I will not pretend to account for this, I will only say that it is not the language of predilection for a favourite amusement, but that the fact is really so. I have even found that those plaything-avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear me away, while such as engage me much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston Lodge, Nov. 17, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—We are therefore not to meet before Christmas. There is a combination of King, Lords, and Commons against it, and we must submit. I do it with an ill grace, but in a corner; and nobody—not even yourself, shall know with how much reluctance. In consideration of the necessity there is, that should you come on this side Christmas you must return immediately after the holidays, on account of those three limbs of the legislature coming together again, I am so far well content that your journey hither should be postponed till your continuance here shall be less liable to interruption; and I console myself in the meantime with frequent recollections of that passage in your letter, in which you speak of frequent visits to Weston.

This is a comfort on which I have only one drawback; and it is the reflection that I make without being able to help it, on the style and nature of my constant experience, which has taught me that what I hope for with most pleasure, is the very thing in which I am most likely to meet with a disappointment;—but sufficient to the past is the evil thereof; let futurity speak for itself.

On Monday last—for headaches and other matters prevented our going sooner—Mrs. Throck. carried us to Chicheley, viz. Mr. Chester's. It seemed as if all the world was there to meet us, though in fact there was not above half of it, their own family, which is very numerous, excepted. The Bishop of Norwich was there, that is to say, the little Doctor Lewis Bagot¹ and his lady. She is handsome, and he in all respects what a Bishop should be. Besides these, Mrs. Praed² was there, and her sister, Miss Backwell. There might be many others, but if there were I overlooked them. 'Foresaid little Bishop and I had much talk about many things, but most about Homer. I have not room to particularise, and will therefore sum up the whole with observing, that both with respect to our ideas of the original, of Pope's translation, and of the sort of translation that is wanted, we were perfectly at an agreement. As to the house, it is handsome, so is the pleasure-ground, and so are all the gardens, which are not less, I believe,

¹ Lewis Bagot (1740-1802) was educated at Westminster, and was one of Cowper's schoolfellows. He married Miss Hay, niece of the Earl of Kinnoul. He became Bishop of Norwich in 1783, and Bishop of St. Asaph in 1790.

² Of Tyingham. Elizabeth and Sarah Backwell of Tyingham were co-heiresses. In 1778 Elizabeth married William Praed, Esq.

than four in number. With respect to the family themselves they are all amiable, and our visit was a very agreeable one.

We sent over to Olney this morning to inquire after the hamper; but the answer of Rogers was, that he and his book-keeper had searched the warehouse for parcels directed hither, but could find none. Either, therefore, something prevented your sending it at the time you mentioned, or it must have reached the inn too late, in which case we shall have it by the next waggon.

I write both to the General and to Mr. Hill by this post; the latter advises me to abstain from Homer, but I might as well advise him to abstain from parchment.—My dearest—farewell, thine ever,
WM. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Nov. 27, 1787.

It is the part of wisdom, my dearest cousin, to sit down contented under the demands of necessity, because they are such. I am sensible that you cannot in my uncle's present infirm state, and of which it is not possible to expect any considerable amendment, indulge either us, or yourself, with a journey to Weston. Yourself I say, both because I know it will give you pleasure to see *Causidice mi*¹ once more, especially in the comfortable abode where you have placed him, and because after so long an imprisonment in London, you who love the country and have a taste for it, would of course

¹ Italian, 'My Counsel.' The appellation which Sir Thomas Hesketh used to give him in jest, when he was of the Temple.

be glad to return to it. For my own part, to me it is ever new, and though I have now been an inhabitant of this village a twelvemonth, and have during the half of that time been at liberty to expatiate, and to make discoveries, I am daily finding out fresh scenes and walks, which you would never be satisfied with enjoying;—some of them are unapproachable by you either on foot or in your carriage. Had you twenty toes (whereas I suppose you have but ten) you could not reach them; and coach-wheels have never been seen there since the flood. Before it indeed (as Burnet says that the earth was then perfectly free from all inequalities in its surface), they might have been seen there every day. We have other walks both upon hill tops and in valleys beneath, some of which by the help of your carriage, and many of them without its help, would be always at your command.

On Monday morning last, Sam² brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows:—‘Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All-Saints, in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You would do me a great favour, sir, if you would furnish me with one.’ To this I replied:—‘Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in

¹ Sam Roberts, Cowper’s man.

particular, Cox the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.' 'Alas! Sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him.' I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons.¹

A few days since I received a second very obliging letter from Mr. Mackenzie.² He tells me that his own papers, which are by far, he is sorry to say, the most numerous, are marked V. I. Z. Accordingly, my dear, I am happy to find that I am engaged in a correspondence with Mr. Viz, a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the

¹ Cowper wrote the Mortuary stanzas for the years 1787, 1788, 1789, 1790, 1792 and 1793. There were none for 1791. Two passages in them have become famous:—

'Like crowded forest trees we stand' (1787).

and

'He lives who lives to God alone' (1793).

² See footnote, p. 156.

profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than anybody.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about sometime with the spoon, and then returned it to her saying, 'I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it.' Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 4, 1787.

I AM glad, my dearest Coz, that my last letter proved so diverting. You may assure yourself of the literal truth of the whole narration, and that however droll, it was not in the least indebted to any embellishments of mine.

You say well, my dear, that in Mr. Throckmorton we have a peerless neighbour; we have so. In point of information upon all important subjects, in respect too of expression and address, and in short, every thing that enters into the idea of a gentleman, I have not found his equal, not often, anywhere. Were I asked who in my judgment approaches nearest to him in all his amiable qualities and qualifications, I should certainly answer his brother, George, who if he be not his exact counter-

part, endued with precisely the same measure of the same accomplishments, is nevertheless deficient in none of them, and is of a character singularly agreeable, in respect of a certain manly, I had almost said heroic, frankness, with which his air strikes one almost immediately. So far as his opportunities have gone, he has ever been as friendly and obliging to us as we could wish him, and were he lord of the Hall to-morrow would, I dare say, conduct himself toward us in such a manner as to leave us as little sensible as possible of the removal of its present owners. But all this I say, my dear, merely for the sake of stating the matter as it is; not in order to obviate, or to prove the inexpediency of any future plan of yours, concerning the place of our residence. Providence and time shape everything; I should rather say Providence alone, for time has often no hand in the wonderful changes that we experience; they take place in a moment. It is not therefore worth while perhaps to consider much what we will or will not do in years to come, concerning which all I can say with certainty at present is, that those years will be to me the most welcome in which I can see the most of you.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Dec. 6, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A short time since, by the help of Mrs. Throckmorton's chaise, Mrs. Unwin and I reached Chicheley. 'Now,' said I to Mrs. Chester, 'I shall write boldly to your brother'¹

¹ Brother-in-law—Rev. Walter Bagot. Mr. Bagot of Chicheley had changed his name to Chester.

Walter, and will do it immediately. I have passed the gulf that parted us, and he will be glad to hear it.' But let not the man who translates Homer be so presumptuous as to have a will of his own, or to promise anything. A fortnight, I suppose, has elapsed since I paid this visit, and I am only now beginning to fulfil what I then undertook to accomplish without delay. The old Grecian must answer for it.

I spent my morning there so agreeably that I have ever since regretted more sensibly, that there are five miles of a dirty country interposed between us. For the increase of my pleasure I had the good fortune to find your brother the Bishop there. We had much talk about many things, but most, I believe, about Homer; and great satisfaction it gave me to find, that on the most important points of that subject his Lordship and I were exactly of one mind. In the course of our conversation he produced from his pocket-book a translation of the first ten or twelve lines of the *Iliad*, and in order to leave my judgment free, informed me kindly at the same time that they were not his own. I read them, and according to the best of my recollection of the original, found them well executed. The Bishop indeed acknowledged that they were not faultless, neither did I find them so. Had they been such, I should have felt their perfection as a discouragement hardly to be surmounted; for at that passage I have laboured more abundantly than at any other, and hitherto with the least success. I am convinced that Homer placed it at the threshold of his work as a scarecrow to all translators. Now, Walter, if thou knowest the author of this version,

and it be not treason against thy brother's confidence in thy secrecy, declare him to me. Had I been so happy as to have seen the Bishop again before he left this country, I should certainly have asked him the question, having a curiosity upon the matter that is extremely troublesome.

The awkward situation in which you found yourself on receiving a visit from an authoress, whose works, though presented to you long before, you had never read, made me laugh, and it was no sin against my friendship for you, to do so. It was a ridiculous distress, and I can laugh at it even now. I hope she catechised you well. How did you extricate yourself? Now laugh at me. The clerk of the parish of All Saints, in the town of Northampton, having occasion for a poet, has appointed me to the office. I found myself obliged to comply. The bellman comes next, and then, I think, though even borne upon your swan's quill, I can soar no higher!—I am, my dear friend, faithfully yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 10, 1787.

I THANK you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one back. If at any time hereafter I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me.

Even as you suspect, my dear, so it proved. The ball was prepared for, the ball was held, and the ball passed, and we had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Throckmorton, knowing our trim, did not give

us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why ? as Sternhold says,—because, as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birthday—and so I told them—but not till it was all over.

Though I have thought proper never to take any notice of the arrival of my MSS., together with the *other good things* in the box, yet certain it is that I received them. I have furbished up the tenth book till it is as bright as silver, and am now occupied in bestowing the same labour upon the eleventh. The twelfth and thirteenth are in the hands of —, and the fourteenth and fifteenth are ready to succeed them. This notable job is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended.

The smith and the carpenter, my dear, are both in the room hanging a bell ; if I therefore make a thousand blunders, let the said intruders answer for them all.

I thank you, my dear, for your history of the G—s. What changes in that family ! And how many thousand families have in the same time experienced changes as violent as theirs ! The course of a rapid river is the justest of all emblems, to express the variableness of our scene below. Shakspeare says, none ever bathed himself twice in the same stream, and it is equally true that the world upon which we close our eyes at night is never the same with that on which we open them in the morning.

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not

always present Mrs. Unwin's love to you, partly for the same reason (Deuce take the smith and the carpenter!), and partly because I forget it. But to present my own I forget never, for I always have to finish my letter, which I know not how to do, my dearest coz, without telling you that I am,—
Ever yours, W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Dec. 13, 1787.

DEAR SIR,—Unless my memory deceives me, I forewarned you that I should prove a very unpunctual correspondent. The work that lies before me engages unavoidably my whole attention. The length of it, the spirit of it, and the exactness that is requisite to its due performance, are so many most interesting subjects of consideration to me, who find that my best attempts are only introductory to others, and that what to day I suppose finished, to-morrow I must begin again. Thus it fares with a translator of Homer. To exhibit the majesty of such a poet in a modern language is a task that no man can estimate the difficulty of till he attempts it. To paraphrase him loosely, to hang him with trappings that do not belong to him, all this is comparatively easy. But to represent him with only his own ornaments, and still to preserve his dignity, is a labour that, if I hope in any measure to achieve it, I am sensible can only be achieved by the most assiduous and most unremitting attention. Our studies, however different in themselves, in respect of the means by which they

are to be successfully carried on, bear some resemblance to each other. A perseverance that nothing can discourage, a minuteness of observation that suffers nothing to escape, and a determination not to be seduced from the straight line that lies before us, by any images with which fancy may present us, are essentials that should be common to us both. There are perhaps few arduous undertakings that are not in fact more arduous than we at first supposed them. As we proceed, difficulties increase upon us, but our hopes gather strength also, and we conquer difficulties which, could we have foreseen them, we should never have had the boldness to encounter. May this be your experience, as I doubt not that it will. You possess by nature all that is necessary to success in the profession that you have chosen. What remains is in your own power. They say of poets that they must be born such: so must mathematicians, so must great generals, and so must lawyers, and so indeed must men of all denominations, or it is not possible that they should excel. But with whatever faculties we are born, and to whatever studies our genius may direct us, studies they must still be. I am persuaded that Milton did not write his *Paradise Lost*, nor Homer his *Iliad*, nor Newton his *Principia*, without immense labour. Nature gave them a bias to their respective pursuits, and that strong propensity, I suppose, is what we mean by genius. The rest they gave themselves. ‘*Macte esto*,’ therefore, have no fears for the issue!

I have had a second kind letter from your friend Mr. —, which I have just answered. I must not I find hope to see him here, at least I must

not much expect it. He has a family that does not permit him to fly southward. I have also a notion, that we three could spend a few days comfortably together, especially in a country like this, abounding in scenes with which I am sure you would both be delighted. Having lived till lately at some distance from the spot that I now inhabit, and having never been master of any sort of vehicle whatever, it is but just now that I begin myself to be acquainted with the beauties of our situation. To you I may hope, one time or other, to show them, and shall be happy to do it, when an opportunity offers.—Yours,
most affectionately, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Dec. 19, 1787 (in Post mark).

SATURDAY, my dearest cousin, was a day of receipts. In the morning I received a box filled with an abundant variety of stationery ware, containing, in particular, a quantity of paper sufficient, well covered with good writing, to immortalise any man. I have nothing to do, therefore, but to cover it as aforesaid, and my name will never die. In the evening I received a smaller box, but still more welcome on account of its contents. It contained an almanack in red morocco, a pencil of a new invention, called an everlasting pencil, and a noble purse, with a noble gift in it, called a Bank note for twenty-five pounds. I need use no arguments to assure you, my cousin, that by the help of ditto note, we shall be able to fadge very comfortably till Christmas is turned, without having the least occasion to draw upon you. By the post yesterday—that is, Sunday morning—I received also a letter

from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularised ; in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, *The Drop of Ink*. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and *Anonymous* there may be some communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.

My toothache is in a great measure, that is to say, almost entirely removed ; not by snipping my ears, as poor Lady Strange's ears were snipped, nor by any other chirurgical operation, except such as I could perform myself. The manner of it was as follows : we dined last Thursday at the Hall ; I sat down to table, trembling lest the tooth, of which I told you in my last, should not only refuse its own office, but hinder all the rest. Accordingly, in less than five minutes, by a hideous dislocation of it, I found myself not only in great pain, but under an absolute prohibition not only to eat, but to speak another word. Great emergencies sometimes meet the most effectual remedies. I resolved, if it were possible, then and there to draw it. This I effected so dexterously by a sudden twitch, and afterwards so dexterously conveyed it into my pocket, that no creature present, not even Mrs. Unwin, who sat facing me, was sensible either of my distress, or of the manner of my deliverance from it. I am poorer by one tooth than I was, but richer by the unimpeded use of all the rest.¹

¹ See next letter.

When I lived in the Temple, I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley and a younger brother of the present Admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him, in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books, which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologised for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake; for at Dublin, it seems, he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revive, and wrote accordingly. I have now, therefore, a correspondent in Ireland, another in Scotland, and a third in Wales.¹ All this would be very diverting, had I a little more time to spare to them.

My dog,² my dear, is a spaniel. Till Miss Gunning³ begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and while he was their property had been accustomed to lie in the chimney corner, among the embers, till the hair was singed from his back, and till nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when nature shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country. He and my cat are excessively fond of each other, and play a thousand gambols together that it is impossible not to admire.

Know thou, that from this time forth, the post comes daily to Weston. This improvement is

¹ *Ireland*, Clotworthy Rowley. *Scotland*, Samuel Rose. *Wales*, Walter Churchey.

² Beau.

³ Of Horton House, near Olney.

effected by an annual subscription of ten shillings. The Throcks. invited us to the measure, and we have acceded to it. Their servant will manage this concern for us at the Olney post office, and the subscription is to pay a man for stumping three times a week from Olney to Newport Pagnel, and back again.

Returning from my walk to-day, while I was passing by some small closes at the back of the town, I heard the voices of some persons extremely merry at the top of the hill. Advancing into the large field behind our house, I there met Mr. Throck., wife, and brother George. Combine in your imagination as large proportions as you can of earth and water intermingled so as to constitute what is commonly called mud, and you will have but an imperfect conception of the quantity that had attached itself to her petticoats: but she had half-boots, and laughed at her own figure. She told me that she had this morning transcribed sixteen pages of my Homer. I observed in reply, that to write so much, and to gather all that dirt, was no bad morning's work, considering the shortness of the days at this season.—Yours, my dear,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1787.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—The Throcks. do not leave Weston till after Easter. But this I hope will have no effect upon your movements, should an opportunity present itself to you of coming sooner. We dined there last Saturday. After dinner, while we

all sat round the fire, I told them, as I related it to you, the adventure of my tooth. This drew from Mrs. Throck. (singular as it must appear) a tale the very counterpart of mine. She, in like manner, had a tooth to draw, while I was drawing mine; and thus it came to pass (the world, I suppose, could not furnish such another instance) that we two, without the least intimation to each other of our respective distress, were employed in the same moment, sitting side by side, in drawing each a tooth: an operation which we performed with equal address, and without being perceived by any one.

This morning had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock; at eight she came to me, and showed me her bed-gown with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her that, if it continued there, it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes; supposing that some of the billets might lie too forward, she disposed them differently; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome (for by this time the room was filled with it), she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which

must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated,—that, secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee.

On the day when we dined as above mentioned at the Hall, Mrs. Throck. had paid a morning visit at Gayhurst. When I inquired how she found Mrs. Wrighte, her account of her was as follows: ‘They say she is much better, but to judge by her looks and her manner, there is no ground to think so. She looks dreadfully, and talks in a rambling way without ceasing.’ If this be a just description of her, and I do not at all doubt it, I am afraid, poor woman! that she is far from well, notwithstanding all that the physician of minds has done for her. In effect there is but One who merits that title; and were all the frantic who have been restored to their reason to make a reasonable use of it, they would acknowledge that God, and not man, had cured them.

I thank you, my dear, for your intentions to furnish me, had I not been otherwise accommodated with one, with an everlasting pencil. You may yet perhaps, on some distant day, have an opportunity to fulfil those intentions, for ‘everlasting,’ as it is called, it is not such in point of duration; but claims the title on this account only, that in the

using, it perpetually works itself to a point, and never wants cutting. Otherwise it wastes and wears, as every thing made of earthly materials must.

When the Throcks. happen to mention the chairs again, your directions shall be pursued. As to the balance due on the plate account, it was, before the purchase of the silk handkerchiefs, etc., either six pounds or six guineas—we cannot recollect which. With the remainder, whatever it shall be found to be, Mrs. Unwin will be obliged to you if you will give it in commission to Mrs. Eaton, to buy for her some muslin for aprons, of the sort that you wore when you were at Olney, viz. with cross stripes. She thinks you called it an English muslin. They must be ell and nail long. But at the same time it does not appear probable to either of us, that there should be money remaining in your hands sufficient for this purpose.

I forgot to tell you that my dog is spotted liver-colour and white, or rather white and chestnut. He is at present my pupil as well as dog, and just before I sat down to write I gave him a lesson in the science of fetch and carry. He performs with an animation past all conception, except your own, whose poor head will never forget Tinker. But I am now grown more reasonable, and never make such a dreadful din but when Beau and I are together. To teach him is necessary, in order that he may take the water, and *that* is necessary in order that he may be sweet in summer. Farewell, my dearest coz. I am, with Mrs. U.'s affections,
Ever thine, most truly, WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 1, 1788.

MY DEAREST Coz,—Mrs. Unwin was mistaken concerning the length of the apron. The ell without the nail will be sufficient. She is obliged to you for your kindness in purchasing the muslin for her, and especially for the interest you take in her very marvellous escape. The more marvellous, because her petticoat was of dimitty. I have placed this at the head of my letter, because at the end of it I am apt to find myself, after having allotted all my sheets to other matters, under some difficulty respecting room for the needful.

Now for another story almost incredible! A story that would be quite such, if it was not certain that you give me credit for any thing. I have read the poem for the sake of which you sent the paper, and was much entertained by it. You think it perhaps, as very well you may, the only piece of that kind that was ever produced. It is indeed original, for I dare say Mr. Merry never saw mine; but certainly it is not unique. For most true it is, my dear, that ten years since, having a letter to write to a friend of mine, to whom I could write any thing, I filled a whole sheet with a composition, both in measure and in manner precisely similar. I have in vain searched for it. It is either burnt or lost. Could I have found it, you would have had double postage to pay. For that one man in Italy, and another in England, who never saw each other, should stumble on a species of verse, in which no other man ever wrote (and I believe that

to be the case), and upon a style and manner too, of which, I suppose, that neither of them had ever seen an example, appears to me so extraordinary a fact, that I must have sent you mine, whatever it had cost you, and am really vexed that I cannot authenticate the story by producing a voucher. The measure I recollect to have been perfectly the same, and as to the manner, I am equally sure of that, and from this circumstance, that Mrs. Unwin and I never laughed more at any production of mine, perhaps not even at *John Gilpin*. But for all this, my dear, you must, as I said, give me credit; for the thing itself is gone to that limbo of vanity, where alone, says Milton, things lost on earth are to be met with. Said limbo is, as you know, in the moon, whither I could not at present convey myself without a good deal of difficulty and inconvenience.

You desired that when Postlethwaite should be settled I would tell you where. I shall surprise you (so far as you concern yourself about him) first agreeably and then otherwise. Mr. Thornton has given him a living. The income of it £100 per annum. The church small, and the congregation such of course, circumstances very well adapted to his case, who could not many years survive the vociferation that he has been obliged to use at Olney. All this is well. But the living is in the hundreds of Essex, where unless he drinks brandy like small beer, which he will never do, he is sure to die of an incurable ague. The natives of the country are seldom free from that distemper, and foreigners, by necessity introduced among them, never. So farewell to poor P. He is gone, he is

fled—gone to his death-bed. And we never shall see him again. So I think Ophelia sings, and so may we.

This morning being the morning of new year's day, I sent to the Hall a copy of verses, addressed to Mrs. Throckmorton, entitled *The Wish, or the Poet's New Year's Gift*.¹ We dine there to-morrow, when, I suppose, I shall hear news of them. Their kindness is so great, and they seize with such eagerness every opportunity of doing all they think will please us, that I held myself almost in duty bound to treat them with this stroke of my profession.

By the way, Mrs. Throckmorton has twice or thrice asked Mrs. Unwin if in any of your letters to me, you have ever made mention of a letter you have had from her. I suppose, therefore, my dear, that either she wrote what you have never received, or you a letter to her, which has miscarried. Thou alone knowest.

The smallpox has done, I believe, all that it has to do at Weston. Old folks, and even women with child, have been inoculated. We talk of our freedom, and some of us are free enough, but not the poor. Dependent as they are upon parish bounty, they are sometimes obliged to submit to impositions, which perhaps in France itself could hardly be paralleled. Can man or woman be said to be free, who is commanded to take a distemper, sometimes at least mortal, and in circumstances most likely to make it so? No circumstance whatever was permitted to exempt the inhabitants of Weston. The old as well as the young, and the pregnant as well as they who had only themselves

¹ Globe Edition, p. 313.

within them, have been inoculated. Were I asked who is the most arbitrary sovereign on earth, I should answer, neither the King of France, nor the Grand Signior, but an Overseer of the poor in England.

I am as heretofore occupied with Homer. My present occupation is the revisal of all I have done, viz. of the first fifteen books. I stand amazed at my own increasing dexterity in the business, being verily persuaded that, as far as I have gone, I have improved the work to double its former value.

They have begun at Olney a Subscription for an Organ in the Church. Weary no doubt of the unceasing praises bestowed upon a place well known by the name of Hogs-norton, they are determined to put in for a share of musical honour.

That you may begin the new year and end it in all health and happiness, and many more when the present shall have been long an old one, is the ardent wish of Mrs. Unwin, and of yours,—my dearest coz,—most cordially,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Jan. 5, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for your information concerning the author of the translation of those lines. Had a man of less note and ability than Lord Bagot produced it, I should have been discouraged. As it is, I comfort myself with the thought, that even he accounted it an achievement worthy of his powers, and that even he found it difficult. Though I never had the honour to be

known to his Lordship, I remember him well at Westminster, and the reputation in which he stood there. Since that time I have never seen him, except once, many years ago, in the House of Commons, when I heard him speak on the subject of a drainage bill better than any member there.

My first thirteen books have been criticised in London; have been by me accommodated to those criticisms, returned to London in their improved state, and sent back to Weston with an *imprimantur*. This would satisfy some poets less anxious than myself about what they expose in public; but it has not satisfied me. I am now revising them again by the light of my own critical taper, and make more alterations than at the first. But are they improvements? you will ask,—Is not the spirit of the work endangered by all this attention to correctness? I think and hope that it is not. Being well aware of the possibility of such a catastrophe, I guard particularly against it. Where I find that a servile adherence to the original would render the passage less animated than it should be, I still, as at the first, allow myself a liberty. On all other occasions I prune with an unsparing hand, determined that there shall not be found in the whole translation an idea that is not Homer's. My ambition is to produce the closest copy possible, and at the same time as harmonious as I know how to make it. This being my object, you will no longer think, if indeed you have thought it at all, that I am unnecessarily and over-much industrious. The original surpasses every thing; it is of an immense length, is composed in the best language ever used upon earth, and deserves, indeed demands, all the

labour that any translator, be he who he may, can possibly bestow on it. Of this I am sure, and your brother the good bishop is of the same mind, that, at present, mere English readers know no more of Homer in reality, than if he had never been translated. That consideration indeed it was, which mainly induced me to the undertaking; and if after all, either through idleness, or dotage upon what I have already done, I leave it chargeable with the same incorrectness as my predecessors, or indeed with any other that I may be able to amend, I had better have amused myself otherwise. And you I know are of my opinion.

I send you the clerk's verses, of which I told you. They are very clerklike, as you will perceive. But plain truth in plain words seemed to me to be the *ne plus ultra* of composition on such an occasion. I might have attempted something very fine, but then the persons principally concerned, viz. my readers, would not have understood me. If it puts them in mind that they are mortal, its best end is answered.

My Dear Walter, adieu! yours faithfully,

W.C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 9, 1788.

MY DEAREST Coz,—It has happened that this day I have had a double share of exercise, and am in consequence a little too weary, and much too sleepy, to be able to write you a very entertaining epistle. In the morning, the sky was of a true January cast, gloomy as black clouds could make it; the wind was cold in the extreme, and now and then it

rained. In defiance of all these difficulties I took my walk ; not so long a walk indeed as I generally take, but long enough for the purposes that a walk is designed to answer. At my return, as I was crossing the grove in front of the Hall, I saw all the family coming forth to do as I had done. I joined them, and added their walk to my own :—the effect is such as I have told you. But I will do my best.

We dined there yesterday. As soon as tea-time arrived, I ascended to the ladies, in the library. Mrs. Frog informed me that her husband, at the end of the week, goes to London for a few days, leaving her at Weston. I replied—Then you must dine with us in his absence. (For it has been for some time a settled point, that when they are separated she shall do so.) She consented, but added, What is to become of George?—He shall dine with us too. But Mr. Frog, who has never dined with you yet, will be affronted.—No, he shall not, for when he returns we will ask him too.

And thus it has come to pass, my dear, that without any motion made toward it on our part, we find ourselves obliged to depart from our original resolve. I could not have answered otherwise than I did, without saying virtually,—‘ Pardon me, madam, we are always ready to partake of your good cheer, but as for our own, that we intend to keep to ourselves.’ We shall therefore now have occasion for the good things with which you have so plentifully furnished us, and now our knives and forks of the newest construction will come into service. Not that we intend to perform any extraordinary feats in the feast-making way ; far from it. We shall measure ourselves and our own ability, not theirs ; and shall

consider what it becomes us to give, and them to be content with at our table. After all, we mean not to establish a regular interchange of invitations; neither I suppose, do they. Our present purpose is to tell them, that whenever it will be convenient to them to take a dinner at the Lodge, we shall always rejoice to see them; and having in that general way discharged the duty that civility and reciprocal hospitality seem to demand from us, there to leave it.

I thought, my dear, having a very sagacious nose in such matters, that your reason for not having answered Mrs. Frog, was not perfectly and altogether sound. I determined, therefore, unless she should repeat her question again, (the question, I mean, whether you had taken any notice in your letters to me, of a letter received from her,) to be myself silent upon the matter; having always observed that an excuse, which is not powerful enough to bear down all before it, does more harm than good; the peccadillo, whatever it be, which was before only suspected, is thenceforth ascertained, and in effect acknowledged. It turned out as I expected; she said nothing, and I said nothing; and, I dare say, nothing more will be said of it hereafter.

My verses¹, such as they were, had at least the effect that I wished. They pleased her, him, and theirs, as far as their fame has hitherto extended. Her brother Gifford in particular, who is excessively attached to his sister, and who arrived at the Hall last Sunday, though he has never given the smallest hint that he knows aught about them, has signified

¹ *The Wish; or, the Poet's New Year's Gift.*

to me sufficiently by his manner, that he has both seen them and is obliged. These remarks of mine should rather have followed than have gone before them; but I am writing to you, and it is no matter; you will be sure to view them with a partial eye, and that may be highly necessary.

Many thanks, my dear, for your kind intentions in the oyster way. My stomach being in point of digestion better than it has been these fourteen years, I am now able to eat them raw. They are more agreeable to me raw than cooked, in whatever manner, and will now therefore be doubly welcome.

Depend upon it as a certainty, that I shall never be found a contributor to an organ at Olney: I never mention that vagary of theirs but with disapprobation. It is not much, indeed that I say concerning any of their proceedings: they are generally so absurd, that it is impossible to give an opinion of them without offending all the parish.

My dearest coz! Heaven bless thee. I have more to say had I room, but nothing with which I can so well occupy the scanty remnant before me, as the often repeated assurance, and always true, that I am ever most affectionately thine,—

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 19, 1788.

WHEN I have prose enough to fill my paper, which is always the case when I write to you, I cannot find in my heart to give a third part of it to verse. Yet this I must do, or I must make my packets up more costly than worshipful, by doubling

the postage upon you, which I should hold to be unreasonable. See then the true reason why I did not send you that same scribblement till you desired it. The thought which naturally presents itself to me on all such occasions is this,—Is not your cousin coming? Why are you impatient? Will it not be time enough to show her your fine things when she arrives?

Fine things indeed I have few. He who has Homer to transcribe may well be contented to do little else. As when an ass, being harnessed with ropes to a sand-cart, drags with hanging ears his heavy burthen, neither filling the long echoing streets with his harmonious bray, nor throwing up his heels behind, frolicsome and airy, as asses less engaged are wont do; so I, satisfied to find myself indispensably obliged to render into the best possible English metre eight and forty Greek books of which the two finest poems in the world consist, account it quite sufficient, if I may at last achieve that labour; and seldom allow myself those pretty little vagaries, in which I should otherwise delight, and of which, if I should live long enough, I intend hereafter to enjoy my fill.

This is the reason, my dear cousin, if I may be permitted to call you so in the same breath with which I have uttered this truly heroic comparison,—this is the reason why I produce at present but few occasional poems, and the preceding reason is that which may account satisfactorily enough for my withholding the very few that I do produce. A thought sometimes strikes me before I rise; if it runs readily into verse, and I can finish it before breakfast, it is well; otherwise it dies, and is

forgotten; for all the subsequent hours are devoted to Homer.

Mr. Throckmorton told me that he would call on you if it were possible, but his business (whatever it may have been, for I know not) lying among the lawyers, and consequently very remote from you, seemed to make it doubtful whether he would have an opportunity or not. I therefore did not mention to you his intention; but it gave me great pleasure to find that he had executed it. If it were not more than almost a Bull, I would say that we have lived with him ever since he has been gone. Twice we have dined at his house, once we drank tea there, and I have made morning calls and have walked with them into the bargain. I forgot, my coz, to tell you in my last what, since you have seen him, it will be of very little use to mention, that his brother Charles is lately married, and that he and his bride are gone with the youngest brother Francis to Lisbon. Francis I have never seen, and understanding that he is an amiable young man and probably short-lived, am glad that I never have.

The day before yesterday, I saw for the first time Bunbury's¹ new print, the *Propagation of a Lie*. Mr. Throckmorton sent it for the amusement of our party. Bunbury sells humour by the yard, and is, I suppose, the first vender of it who ever did so. He cannot therefore be said to have humour without measure (pardon a pun, my dear, from a man who has not made one before, these forty years), though he may certainly be said to be immeasurably droll.

¹ Bunbury, Henry William (1750-1811), a caricaturist, who was educated at Westminster school.

The original thought is good, and the exemplification of it, in those very expressive figures, admirable. A poem on the same subject, displaying all that is displayed in those attitudes, and in those features (for faces they can hardly be called), would be most excellent. The affinity of the two arts, viz. verse and painting, has been observed; possibly the happiest illustration of it would be found, if some poet would ally himself to some draughtsman, as Bunbury, and undertake to write everything he should draw. Then let a musician be admitted of the party. He should compose the said poem, adapting notes to it exactly accommodated to the theme; so should the sister arts be proved to be indeed sisters, and the world die of laughing.

It is now time, my dear, that I should thank you, as I do most heartily, for a barrel of excellent oysters, and for brawn equally good. I shall not presently be reduced again to the necessity of sucking eggs for supper.

Casting my eye over the bill of items that you lately sent relating to the expenditure of certain moneys arising from the sale of plate, I observe that muslin for me stands there with no charge opposed to it. This imports an obligation on my part to thank you, my cousin, on that account also. But I will do more than thank you. I will be grateful, by God's help, and remember with affection both that and all your other kindnesses to my dying day.

Did Mr. Throckmorton tell you a diverting story of the arrival of a new parson¹ in this village, and of an adventure that befell me in consequence? If

¹ Rev. L. Canniford.

not I will give it you in my next. At present I will add no more, because I cannot, than that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best love, most truly yours,
my dearest cousin, WM. COWPER.

It has happened twice that I have written, as I do now, on a Friday, and have dated my letter accordingly, though you could not possibly receive it till Monday. This has occasioned an appearance of unnecessary delay, though in reality there has been none.—My best respects to Mrs. Hill when you see her next.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 21, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your last letter informed us that you were likely to be much occupied for some time in writing on a subject that must be interesting to a person of your feelings,—the Slave Trade. I was unwilling to interrupt your progress in so good a work, and have therefore enjoined myself a longer silence than I should otherwise have thought excusable; though, to say the truth, did not our once intimate fellowship in the things of God recur to my remembrance, and present me with something like a warrant for doing it, I should hardly prevail with myself to write at all. Letters such as mine, to a person of a character such as yours, are like snow in harvest; and you well say, that if I will send you a letter that you can answer, I shall make your part of the business easier than it is. This I would gladly do; but though I abhor a

vacuum as much as Nature herself is said to do, yet a vacuum I am bound to feel of all such matter as may merit your perusal.

I expected that before this time I should have had the pleasure of seeing your friend Mr. Bean,¹ but his stay in this country was so short, that it was hardly possible he should find an opportunity to call. I have not only heard a high character of that gentleman from yourself, whose opinion of men as well as of other matters weighs more with me than anybody's; but from two or three different persons likewise, not ill-qualified to judge. From all that I have heard, both from you and them, I have every reason to expect that I shall find him both an agreeable and useful neighbour; and if he can be content with me (for that seems doubtful, poet as I am, and now, alas! nothing more), it seems certain that I shall be highly satisfied with him.

Here is much shifting and changing of ministers. Two are passing away, and two are stepping into their places. Mr. Bull,² I suppose, whom I know not, is almost upon the wing; and Mr. Postlethwaite,³ with whom I have not been very much acquainted, is either going or gone. A Mr. Canniford⁴ is come to occupy, for the present at least, the place of the former; and if he can possess himself of the two curacies of Ravenstone and Weston, will, I imagine, take up his abode here. He lives now with Mr. Socket, who is lately become an inhabitant of our village, and having, as I

¹ Rev. James Bean, Vicar of Olney from 1788 to 1795.

² Rev. Thomas Bull, the lame curate of Weston Underwood.

³ Rev. Richard Postlethwaite, curate of Olney (1785-1787).

⁴ Rev. L. Canniford, curate of Weston (1788-1789).

understand, no engagements elsewhere, he will doubtless be happy to obtain a lasting one in this country. What acceptance he finds among the people of Ravenstone I have not heard; but at Olney, where he has preached once, he was hailed as the sun by the Greenlanders after half a year of lamp light. The *connoisseurs* in preaching, or rather perhaps in preachers, affirm that he resembles Mr. Whitefield more than any man ever did, *save and except himself the said Mr. Whitefield*. Thus they speak of him at present; but the same persons had nearly the same opinion of Mr. Page,¹ of wife-beating memory, for which reason I find myself rather slow to suppose them infallible.

Providence interposed to preserve me from the heaviest affliction that I can now suffer, or I had lately lost Mrs. Unwin, and in a way the most shocking imaginable. Having kindled her fire in the room where she dresses (an office that she always performs herself), she placed the candle on the hearth, and, kneeling, addressed herself to her devotions. A thought struck her, while thus occupied, that the candle being short might possibly catch her clothes. She pinched it out with the tongs, and set it on the table. In a few minutes the chamber was so filled with smoke that her eyes watered, and it was hardly possible to see across it. Supposing that it proceeded from the chimney, she pushed the billets backwards, and while she did so, casting her eye downward, perceived that her bed-gown was on fire. In fact, before she extinguished the candle, the mischief that she apprehended was begun; and when she related the

¹ Rev. B. Page, the curate of Olney who succeeded Newton.

matter to me she showed me her bed-gown with a hole burnt in it as large as this sheet, and her petticoat burnt also in two places. It is not possible, perhaps, that so tragical a death should overtake a person actually engaged in prayer, for her escape seems almost a miracle. Her presence of mind, by which she was enabled, without calling for help or waiting for it, to gather up her clothes and plunge them, burning as they were, in water, seems as wonderful a part of the occurrence as any. The very report of fire, though distant, has rendered hundreds torpid and incapable of self-succour; how much more was such a disability to be expected, when the fire had not seized a neighbour's house, or begun its devastations on our own, but was actually consuming the apparel that she wore, and seemed in possession of her person?

It draws toward supper time. I therefore heartily wish you a good night; and with our best affections to yourself, Mrs. Newton, and Miss Catlett, I remain, my dear friend, truly and warmly yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 30, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It is a fortnight since I heard from you,—that is to say, a week longer than you have accustomed me to, wait for a letter. I do not forget that you have recommended it to me on occasions somewhat similar, to banish all anxiety, and to ascribe your silence only to the interruptions of company. Good advice, my dear, but not easily taken by a man circumstanced as I am. I have

learned in the school of adversity, a school from which I have no expectation that I shall ever be dismissed, to apprehend the worst, and have ever found it the only course in which I can indulge myself without the least danger of incurring a disappointment. This kind of experience, continued through many years, has given me such an habitual bias to the gloomy side of everything, that I never have a moment's ease on any subject to which I am not indifferent. How then can I be easy, when I am left afloat upon a sea of endless conjectures, of which you furnish the occasion? Write, I beseech you, and do not forget that I am now a battered actor upon this turbulent stage; that what little vigour of mind I ever had, of the self-supporting kind I mean, has long since been broken; and that though I can bear nothing well, yet anything better than a state of ignorance concerning your welfare. I have spent hours in the night leaning upon my elbow and wondering what your silence means. I entreat you once more to put an end to these speculations, which cost me more animal spirits than I can spare; if you cannot without great trouble to yourself, which in your situation may very possibly be the case, contrive opportunities of writing so frequently as usual, only say it, and I am content. I will wait, if you desire it, as long for every letter,—but then let them arrive at the period once fixed, exactly at the time, for my patience will not hold out an hour beyond it.

Mrs. Unwin desires me to thank you for the muslin brought by the Throckmortons, which is exactly what she wanted. There is nothing more that I can add at present except that with her

affectionate respects, I am, my dearest cousin,
sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 1, 1788.

PARDON me, my dearest cousin, the mournful ditty that I sent you last. There are times when I see everything through a medium that distresses me to an insupportable degree, and that letter was written in one of them. A fog that had for three days obliterated all the beauties of Weston, and a north-east wind, might possibly contribute not a little to the melancholy that indited it. But my mind is now easy; your letter has made it so, and I feel myself as blithe as a bird in comparison. I love you, my cousin, and cannot suspect, either with or without cause, the least evil in which you may be concerned, without being greatly troubled! Oh trouble! the portion of all mortals,—but mine in particular, would I had never known thee, or could bid thee farewell for ever; for I meet thee at every turn; my pillows are stuffed with thee, my very roses smell of thee, and even my cousin, who would cure me of all trouble if she could, is sometimes innocently the cause of trouble to me.

I now see the unreasonableness of my late trouble, and would, if I could trust myself so far, promise never again to trouble either myself or you in the same manner, unless warranted by some more substantial ground of apprehension.

What I said concerning Homer, my dear, was spoken, or rather written, merely under the influence of a certain jocularity that I felt at that moment. I

am in reality so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand-cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and in this last revisal have elevated the expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my *Iliad* to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed,¹ a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs. Unwin while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had anything like a due conception of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you, and will now say no more.

Adieu!—my dear, will you never speak of coming to Weston more?

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 7, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Thanks beforehand for the books which you give me to expect. They will

¹ Rev. Samuel Greatheed of Newport-Pagnell.

all be welcome. Of the two editions of Shakespeare I prefer that which is printed in the largest type, independent of all other considerations. Don Quixote by any hand must needs be welcome, and by Smollett's especially, because I have never seen it. He had a drollery of his own, which, for aught I know, may suit an English taste as well as that of Cervantes, perhaps better, because to us somewhat more intelligible.

It is pretty well known (the clerk took care it should be so), both at Northampton and in this county, who wrote the Mortuary Verses. All that I know of their success is, that he sent a bundle of them to Maurice Smith at Olney, who sold them for threepence a piece,—a high price for a *Memento Mori*, a commodity not generally in great request. The other small poem, addressed to Mrs. Throck., has given, as I understand, great satisfaction at Bucklands.¹ The old baronet and his lady, having heard that such a piece existed (Mrs. Bromley Chester, I suppose, must have been their informant), wrote to desire a copy. A copy was sent, and they answered it with warm encomiums.

Mr. Bull, the lame curate, having been lately preferred to a living, another was of course wanted to supply his place. By the recommendation of Mr. Romaine, a Mr. Canniford came down. He lodges at Mr. Socket's in this village, and Mr. Socket lives in the small house to which you had once conceived a liking. Our lacquey² is also clerk of the parish. Canniford a day or two after his arrival had a corpse to bury at Weston. Having occasion to consult with the clerk concerning this

¹ The Berkshire seat of the Throckmortons.

² Sam Roberts.

matter, he sought him in our kitchen. Samuel entered the study to inform us that there was a clergyman without: he was accordingly invited in, and in he came. We had but lately dined; the wine was on the table, and he drank three glasses while the corpse in question was getting ready for its last journey. The moment he entered the room, I felt myself incurably prejudiced against him; his features, his figure, his address, and all that he uttered, confirmed that prejudice, and I determined, having once seen him, to see him no more. Two days after, he overtook me in the village. 'Your humble servant, Mr. Cowper! a fine morning, sir, for a walk. I had like to have called on you yesterday morning to tell you that I had become your near neighbour. I live at Mr. Socket's.' I answered without looking at him, as drily as possible, 'Are you come to stay any time in the country?' He believed he was. 'Which way,' I replied, 'are you going? to Olney?' 'Yes.' 'I am going to Mr. Throckmorton's garden, and I wish you a good day, sir.' I was in fact going to Olney myself, but this rencontre gave me such a violent twist another way that I found it impossible to recover that direction, and accordingly there we parted. All this I related at the Hall the next time we dined there, describing also my apprehensions and distress lest, whether I would or not, I should be obliged to have intercourse with a man to me so perfectly disagreeable. A good deal of laugh and merriment ensued, and there for that time it ended. The following Sunday, in the evening, I received a note to this purport: 'Mr. Canniford's compliments,' etc. Understanding that

my friends at the Hall were to dine with me the next day, he took the liberty to invite himself to eat a bit of mutton with me, being sure that I should be happy to introduce him. Having read the note, I threw it to Mrs. Unwin. 'There,' said I, 'take that and read it; then tell me if it be not an effort of impudence the most extraordinary you ever heard of.' I expected some such push from the man; I knew he was equal to it. She read it, and we were both of a mind. I sat down to my desk, and with a good deal of emotion gave it just such an answer as it would have deserved had it been genuine. But having heard by accident in the morning that he spells his name with a C, and observing in the note that it was spelt with a K, a suspicion struck me that it was a fiction. I looked at it more attentively, and perceived that it was directed by Mrs. Throck. The inside, I found afterwards, was written by her brother George. This served us with another laugh on the subject, and I have hardly seen, and never spoken to, Mr. Caniford since. So, my dear, *that's the little story I promised you.*

Mr. Bull called here this morning; from him I learn what follows concerning Postlethwaite.¹ He waited on the Bishop of London, like a blundering ignoramus as he is, without his canonicals. The Bishop was highly displeased, as he had cause to be; and having pretty significantly given him to know it, addressed himself to his chaplain with tokens of equal displeasure, enjoining him never more to admit a clergyman to him in such attire. To pay this visit he made a journey from Clapham to town

¹ Rev. Richard Postlethwaite, curate of Olney.

on horseback. His horse he left at an inn on the Lambeth side of Westminster Bridge. Thence he proceeded to the Bishop's, and from the Bishop's to Mr. Scott. Having finished this last visit he begged Mr. Scott's company to the inn where he had left his horse, which he said was at the foot of *London* Bridge. Thither they went, but neither the inn nor the horse were there. Then, says Postlethwaite, it must be at Blackfriars' Bridge that I left it. Thither also they went, but to as little purpose. Luckily for him there was but one more bridge, and there they found it. To make the poor youth amends for all these misadventures, it so happened that the incumbent, his predecessor, died before the crops of last year were reaped. The whole profits of that year, by consequence, go into P.'s pocket, which was never so stuffed before.

Good night, my dearest coz. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.—Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

There now enters upon the stage another figure, Mrs. King,¹ wife of the Rev. John King, Rector of Pertenhall, Beds. She had been a friend of Cowper's brother John, and having read *The Task*, took upon herself to write to the poet. This was the beginning of a very pleasant friendship.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Lodge, near Olney, Bucks,
Feb. 12, 1788.

DEAR MADAM,—A letter from a lady who was once intimate with my brother could not fail of

¹ Born 1735 ; died 1795.

being most acceptable to me. I lost him just in the moment when those truths which have recommended my volumes to your approbation were become his daily sustenance, as they had long been mine. But the will of God was done. I have sometimes thought that had his life been spared, being made brothers by a stricter tie than ever in the bands of the same faith, hope, and love, we should have been happier in each other than it was in the power of mere natural affection to make us. But it was his blessing to be taken from a world in which he had no longer any wish to continue; and it will be mine, if while I dwell in it, my time may not be altogether wasted. In order to effect that good end, I wrote what I am happy to find it has given you pleasure to read. But for that pleasure, madam, you are indebted neither to me, nor to my Muse; but (as you are well aware) to Him who alone can make divine truths palatable, in whatever vehicle conveyed. It is an established philosophical axiom, that nothing can communicate what it has not in itself; but in the effects of Christian communion, a very strong exception is found to this general rule, however self-evident it may seem. A man himself destitute of all spiritual consolation, may, by occasion, impart it to others. Thus I, it seems, who wrote those very poems to amuse a mind oppressed with melancholy, and who have myself derived from them no other benefit (for mere success in authorship will do me no good), have nevertheless, by so doing, comforted others, at the same time that they administer to me no consolation. But I will proceed no farther in this strain, lest my prose should damp a pleasure that my verse has

happily excited. On the contrary, I will endeavour to rejoice in your joy, and especially because I have been myself the instrument of conveying it.

Since the receipt of your obliging letter, I have naturally had recourse to my recollection to try if it would furnish me with the name that I find at the bottom of it. At the same time, I am aware that there is nothing more probable than that my brother might be honoured with your friendship without mentioning it to me; for except a very short period before his death, we lived necessarily at a considerable distance from each other. Ascribe it, madam, not to an impertinent curiosity, but to a desire of better acquaintance with you, if I take the liberty to ask (since ladies' names, at least, are changeable), whether yours was at that time the same as now?

Sincerely wishing you all happiness, and especially that which I am sure you covet most, the happiness which is from above, I remain, dear madam—early as it may seem to say it, Affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, Feb. 14, 1788.

DEAR SIR,—Though it be long since I received your last, I have not yet forgotten the impression it made upon me, nor how sensibly I felt myself obliged by your unreserved and friendly communications. I will not apologise for my silence in the interim, because apprised as you are of my present occupation, the excuse that I might allege will present itself to you of course, and to dilate upon it would therefore be waste of paper.

You are in possession of the best security imaginable for the due improvement of your time, which is a just sense of its value. Had I been, when at your age, as much affected by that important consideration as I am at present, I should not have devoted, as I did, all the earliest parts of my life to amusement only. I am now in the predicament into which the thoughtlessness of youth betrays nine-tenths of mankind, who never discover that the health and good spirits which generally accompany it, are in reality blessings only according to the use we make of them, till advanced years begin to threaten them with the loss of both. How much wiser would thousands have been than now they ever will be, had a puny constitution, or some occasional infirmity, constrained them to devote those hours to study and reflection, which for want of some such check they have given entirely to dissipation! I therefore account you happy, who, young as you are, need not be informed that you cannot always be so; and who already know that the materials, upon which age can alone build its comfort, should be brought together at an earlier period. You have indeed, in losing a father, lost a friend, but you have not lost his instructions. His example was not buried with him; but happily for you (happily because you are desirous to avail yourself of it), still lives in your remembrance, and is cherished in your best affections.

Your last letter was dated from the house of a gentleman, who was, I believe, my schoolfellow. For the Mr. C——, who lived at Watford, while I had any connection with Hertfordshire, must have been the father of the present, and according to his

age, and the state of his health, when I saw him last, must have been long dead. I never was acquainted with the family further than by report, which always spoke honourably of them, though in all my journeys to and from my father's I must have passed the door. The circumstance, however, reminds me of the beautiful reflection of Glaucus in the sixth *Iliad*; beautiful as well for the affecting nature of the observation, as for the justness of the comparison, and the incomparable simplicity of the expression. I feel that I shall not be satisfied without transcribing it, and yet perhaps *my* Greek may be difficult to decipher.

Οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίηδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
 Φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἀνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
 Τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη.
 Ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεή, ἣ μὲν φύει, ἣ δ' ἀπολήγει.¹

Excuse this piece of pedantry in a man whose Homer is always before him. What would I give that he were living now, and within my reach! I, of all men living, have the best excuse for indulging such a wish, unreasonable as it may seem, for I have no doubt that the fire of his eye, and the smile of his lips, would put me now and then in possession of his full meaning more effectually than any commentator. I return you many thanks for the elegies which you sent me, both which I think deserving of much commendation. I should requite

¹ 'Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
 Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;
 Another race the following spring supplies,
 They fall successive, and successive rise:
 So generations in their course decay,
 So flourish these, when those have pass'd away.'

Pope's Version.

you but ill by sending you my mortuary verses, neither at present can I prevail on myself to do it, having no frank, and being conscious that they are not worth carriage without one. I have one copy left, and that copy I will keep for you. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 16, 1788.

I HAVE now three letters of yours, my dearest cousin, before me, all written in the space of a week, and must be indeed insensible of kindness, did I not feel yours on this occasion. I cannot describe to you, neither could you comprehend it if I should, the manner in which my mind is sometimes impressed with melancholy on particular subjects. Your late silence was such a subject. I heard, saw, and felt a thousand terrible things which had no real existence, and was haunted by them night and day, till they at last extorted from me the doleful epistle, which I have since wished had been burned before I sent it. But the cloud has passed, and as far as you are concerned, my heart is once more at rest.

Before you gave me the hint, I had once or twice, as I lay on my bed, watching the break of day, ruminated on the subject which, in your last but one, you recommended to me.

Slavery, or a release from slavery, such as the poor negroes have endured, or perhaps both these topics together, appeared to me a theme so important at the present juncture, and at the same time so susceptible of poetical management, that I more than once perceived myself ready to start in that career, could I have allowed myself to desert

Homer for so long a time as it would have cost me to do them justice.

While I was pondering these things, the public prints informed me that Miss More was on the point of publication, having actually finished what I had not yet begun. The sight of her advertisement convinced me that my best course would be that to which I felt myself most inclined,—to persevere, without turning aside to attend to any other call, however alluring, in the business I have in hand.

It occurred to me likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren; and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first, of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question.

On all these accounts I judged it best to be silent, and especially because I cannot doubt that some effectual measures will now be taken to alleviate the miseries of their condition, the whole nation being in possession of the case, and it being impossible also to allege an argument in behalf of man-merchandise, that can deserve a hearing. I shall be glad to see Hannah More's poem; she is a favourite writer with me, and has more nerve and energy both in her thoughts and language than half the he rhymers in the kingdom. *The Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* will likewise be most acceptable. I want to learn as much of the world as I can, but to acquire that learning at a distance; and a book with such a title promises fair to serve the purpose effectually.

I recommend it to you, my dear, by all means to embrace the fair occasion, and to put yourself in the way of being squeezed and incommoded a

few hours, for the sake of hearing and seeing what you will never have an opportunity to see and hear hereafter,—the trial of a man who has been greater and more feared than the great Mogul himself. Whatever we are at home, we certainly have been tyrants in the East; and if these men have, as they are charged, rioted in the miseries of the innocent, and dealt death to the guiltless with an unsparing hand, may they receive a retribution that shall in future make all governors and judges of ours, in those distant regions, tremble! While I speak thus, I equally wish them acquitted. They were both my schoolfellows, and for Hastings¹ I had a particular value. Farewell.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Weston, Feb. 19, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have much to thank you for. In the first place for your Sermon; in which you have addressed your brethren with all the delicacy and fidelity that were due both to their character and your own. If they were not impressed by it, it must be because, like the rabbis of old, they are less impressible than others. Such I suppose they are, and will be, so long as doctorship and clerical honours of every degree shall have a tendency to make unenlightened simpletons imagine themselves the only interpreters of God. In the next place, for your thoughts on the Slave Trade; in which there is such evidence of con-

¹ Warren Hastings (1732-1818), Governor-General of India, was impeached in 1788. The trial concluded in 1795 with his acquittal.

scientious candour and moderation as will make it, I doubt not, to all prudent persons the most satisfactory publication on the subject. It is a subject on which I can ruminate till I feel myself lost in mazes of speculation, never to be unravelled. Could I suppose that the cruel hardships under which millions of that unhappy race have lived and died, were only preparatory to a deliverance to be wrought for them hereafter, like that of Israel out of Egypt, my reasonings would cease, and I should at once acquiesce in a dispensation, severe indeed for a time, but leading to invaluable and everlasting mercies. But there is no room, Scripture affords no warrant for any such expectations. A question then presents itself which I cannot help asking, though conscious that it ought to be suppressed. Is it to be esteemed a sufficient vindication of divine justice, if these miserable creatures, tormented as they have been from generation to generation, shall at last receive some relief, some abatement of their woes, shall not be treated absolutely as brutes for the future? The thousands of them who have already passed into an eternal state, hopeless of any thing better than they found in this life, what is to become of them? Is it essential to the perfection of a plan concerted by infinite wisdom, that such wretches should exist at all, who from the beginning of their being, through all its endless duration, can experience nothing for which they should say, It is good for us that we were created? These reasonings, and such as these, engage me often, and more intensely than I wish them to do, when the case of the poor Negroes occurs to me. I know that the difficulty, if it cannot be solved,

may be severed, and that the answer to which it lies open is this or somewhat like it,—God is sovereign : All are His, and He may do what He will with His own : What passes upon this grain of sand, which we call the earth, is trivial when considered with reference to those purposes that have the universe for their object. And lastly—All these things will be accounted for and explained hereafter. An answer like this would have satisfied me once, when I was myself happy ;—for I have frequently thought that the happy are easily reconciled to the woes of the miserable. But in the school of affliction I have learned to cavil and to question ; and finding myself in my own case reduced frequently to the necessity of accounting for my own lot by the means of an uncontrollable sovereignty which gives no account of its matters, am apt to discover, what appear to me, tremendous effects of the same sovereignty in the case of others. Then I feel—I will not tell you what—and yet I must—a wish that I had never been, a wonder that I am, and an ardent but hopeless desire not to be. Thus have I written to you my whole heart on a subject which I thought to have touched only, and to have left it. But the pen once in my hand, I am no longer master of my own intentions.

To make you some small amends (the best I can at present), after having thanked you in the third place for a basket of most excellent fish (halibut and lobsters), I will subjoin some stanzas in the mortuary style, composed at the request of the clerk of All-Saints' parish, Northampton. They were printed at the foot of his Bill of Mortality, published at Christmas last. Some time in No-

vember the said clerk was introduced to me one morning before breakfast. Being asked his business, he told me that he wanted verses, and should be much obliged to me if I would furnish them. I replied, that in Northampton there must be many poets, because poets abound everywhere, and because the newspaper printed there was seldom destitute of a copy. I then mentioned in particular his namesake, Mr. Cox the statuary, who to my knowledge often woos the Muse, and not without some cause to boast of his success. To which he answered—What you say, sir, is true. But Mr. Cox is a gentleman of much reading, and the people of our town do not well understand him. He has written for me, but nine in ten of us were stone-blind to his meaning. Finding that he had an answer to all that I could urge, and particularly affected by the eulogium implied in his last, I suffered myself to be persuaded.

We are truly sorry to be informed, as we were by Mr. Bull, that Mrs. Newton is so much indisposed. Our affectionate remembrances and best wishes attend you both.—Yours most sincerely, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

A letter from Cowper's old Templar friend, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, was answered as follows :—

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

Weston Underwood, Feb. 21, 1788.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,—I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours in the Temple. From

the Temple I went to St. Albans, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connection with a most valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we must associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas¹ of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding, who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh

¹ Sir Nicholas Throckmorton (1515-1571), a relative of Henry VIII.'s wife, Catherine Parr, became one of Elizabeth's most active advisers.

(widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere*? But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a school boy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Consequences follow that were never dreamt of. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope,

as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet¹ in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me. I translated a few lines into blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favoured with health to enable me to translate the whole. The *Iliad* I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and was hindered near a twelve-month. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as to the end of the fifteenth *Iliad*, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable, that it shall be found a close translation: in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgment of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The *Odyssey* I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself your influence, as far as it extends. If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favour it. I could order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to act. But they are not indispensably

¹ The *Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq.*, written by Himself.

necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labours of it deserve, is yet highly honourable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion.—Yours, very affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 22, 1788.

I DO not wonder that your ears and feelings were hurt by Mr. Burke's severe invective. But you are to know, my dear, or probably you know it already, that the prosecution of public delinquents has always, and in all countries, been thus conducted. The style of a criminal charge of this kind has been an affair settled among orators from the days of Tully to the present; and like all other practices that have obtained for ages, this in particular seems to have been founded originally in reason, and in the necessity of the case.

He who accuses another to the state, must not appear himself unmoved by the view of crimes with which he charges him, lest he should be suspected of fiction, or of precipitancy, or of a consciousness that after all he shall not be able to prove his allegations. On the contrary, in order to impress the minds of his hearers with a persuasion that he himself at least is convinced of the criminality of the prisoner, he must be vehement, energetic, rapid; must call him tyrant, and traitor, and every thing else that is odious, and all this to his face, because

all this, bad as it is, is no more than he undertakes to prove in the sequel. And if he cannot prove it he must himself appear in a light very little more desirable, and at the best to have trifled with the tribunal to which he has summoned him.

Thus Tully, in the very first sentence of his oration against Catiline, calls him a monster; a manner of address in which he persisted till said monster, unable to support the fury of the accuser's eloquence any longer, rose from his seat, elbowed for himself a passage through the crowd, and at last burst from the senate house in an agony, as if the Furies themselves had followed him.

And now, my dear, though I have thus spoken, and have seemed to plead the cause of that species of eloquence which you, and every creature who has your sentiments, must necessarily dislike, perhaps I am not altogether convinced of its propriety. Perhaps, at the bottom, I am much more of opinion that if the charge, unaccompanied by any inflammatory matter and simply detailed, being once delivered into the court and read aloud, the witnesses were immediately examined, and sentence pronounced according to the evidence; not only the process would be shortened, much time and much expense saved, but justice would have at least as fair play as now she has. Prejudice is of no use in weighing the question guilty or not guilty? and the principal aim, end, and effect of such introductory harangues is to create as much prejudice as possible. When you and I therefore shall have the sole management of such a business entrusted to us, we will order it otherwise.

I was glad to learn from the papers that our

cousin Henry shone as he did in reading the charge.
 This must have given much pleasure to the General.
 —Thy ever affectionate,
 W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 1, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—That my letters may not be exactly an echo to those which I receive, I seldom read a letter immediately before I answer it, trusting to my memory to suggest to me such of its contents as may call for particular notice. Thus I dealt with your last, which lay in my desk while I was writing to you. But my memory, or rather my recollection, failed me, in that instance. I had not forgotten Mr. Bean's letter, nor my obligations to you for the communication of it: but they did not happen to present themselves to me, in the proper moment, nor till some hours after my own had been dispatched. I now return it, with many thanks for so favourable a specimen of its author. That he is a good man, and a wise man, its testimony proves sufficiently; and I doubt not, that when he shall speak for himself, he will be found an agreeable one. For it is possible to be very good, and, in many respects, very wise; yet, at the same time, not the most delightful companion. Excuse the shortness of an occasional scratch, which I send in much haste; and believe me, my dear friend, with our united love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, of whose health we hope to hear a more favourable account, as the year rises,—Your truly affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 3, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I had not, as you may imagine, read more than two or three lines of the enclosed, before I perceived that I had accidentally come to the possession of another man's property; who, by the same misadventure, has doubtless occupied mine. I accordingly folded it again the moment after having opened it, and now return it.

The bells of Olney both last night and this morning have announced the arrival of Mr. Bean.¹ I understand that he is now come with his family. It will not be long, therefore, before we shall be acquainted. I rather wish than hope that he may find himself comfortably situated; but the parishioners' admiration of Mr. Canniford, whatever the bells may say, is no good omen. It is hardly to be expected that the same people should admire both. The parishioners of Ra'nstone² have been suitors to Mr. Finch that he would appoint that gentleman his curate, to which suit of theirs Mr. Finch has graciously condescended, and he is gone to reside among them.

I have lately been engaged in a correspondence with a lady whom I never saw. She lives at Perten-hall, near Kimbolton, and is the wife of a Dr. King, who has the living. She is, I understand, very happy in her husband, who for that reason I should suppose is at least no enemy to the gospel, for she is evidently herself a Christian, and a very gracious one. I would that she had you for a correspondent

¹ Appointed Vicar of Olney on the death of Rev. Moses Browne, 1788.

² Ravenstone.

rather than me. One letter from you would do her more good than a ream of mine. But so it is ; and since I cannot depute my office to you, and am bound by all sorts of considerations to answer her this evening, I must necessarily quit you that I may have time to do it.

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 3, 1788.

ONE day last week, Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk and returning homeward through the wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard ; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the wilderness, the hounds entered also ; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him : a conclusion which I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured

the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitchfork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard; and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds;—one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, ‘tear him to pieces’—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely. Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much

of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.—Yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, March 3, 1788.

I OWE you many acknowledgments, dear madam, for that unreserved communication, both of your history and of your sentiments, with which you favoured me in your last. It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are so happily circumstanced, both in respect of situation and frame of mind. With your view of religious subjects, you could not indeed, speaking properly, be pronounced unhappy in any circumstances; but to have received from above not only that faith which reconciles the heart to affliction, but many outward comforts also, and especially that greatest of all earthly comforts, a comfortable home, is happiness indeed. May you long enjoy it! As to health or sickness, you have learned already their true value, and know well that the former is no blessing, unless it be sanctified, and that the latter is one of the greatest we can receive, when we are enabled to make a proper use of it.

There is nothing in my story that can possibly be worth your knowledge; yet, lest I should seem to treat you with a reserve which, at your hands, I have not experienced, such as it is, I will relate it.—I was bred to the law; a profession to which I was never much inclined, and in which I engaged rather because I was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than because I had any hopes of success in it myself. I spent twelve years in the Temple, where I made no progress in that science,

to cultivate which I was sent thither. During this time my father died. Not long after him, died my mother-in-law; and at the expiration of it, a melancholy seized me, which obliged me to quit London, and consequently to renounce the bar. I lived some time at St. Albans. After having suffered in that place long and extreme affliction, the storm was suddenly dispelled, and the same day-spring from on high which has arisen upon you, arose on me also. I spent eight years in the enjoyment of it; and have ever since the expiration of those eight years, been occasionally the prey of the same melancholy as at first. In the depths of it I wrote the Task, and the volume which preceded it; and in the same deeps am now translating Homer. But to return to Saint Albans. I abode there a year and half. Thence I went to Cambridge, where I spent a short time with my brother, in whose neighbourhood I determined, if possible, to pass the remainder of my days. He soon found a lodging for me at Huntingdon. At that place I had not resided long, when I was led to an intimate connection with a family of the name of Unwin. I soon quitted my lodging, and took up my abode with them. I had not lived long under their roof, when Mr. Unwin, as he was riding one Sunday morning to his cure at Graveley, was thrown from his horse; of which fall he died. Mrs. Unwin having the same views of the gospel as myself, and being desirous of attending a purer ministration of it than was to be found at Huntingdon, removed to Olney, where Mr. Newton was at that time the preacher, and I with her. There we continued till Mr. Newton, whose family was the only one in the place with which we could have a connection, and

with whom we lived always on the most intimate terms, left it. After his departure, finding the situation no longer desirable, and our house threatening to fall upon our heads, we removed hither. Here we have a good house, in a most beautiful village, and, for the greatest part of the year, a most agreeable neighbourhood. Like you, madam, I stay much at home, and have not travelled twenty miles from this place and its environs, more than once these twenty years.

All this I have written, not for the singularity of the matter, as you will perceive, but partly for the reason which I gave at the outset, and partly that, seeing we are become correspondents, we may know as much of each other as we can, and that as soon as possible.

I beg, madam, that you will present my best respects to Mr. King, whom, together with yourself, should you at any time hereafter take wing for a longer flight than usual, we shall be happy to receive at Weston; and believe me, dear madam, his and your obliged and affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 12, 1788.

Slavery, and the Manners of the Great, I have read. The former I admired, as I do all that Miss More¹ writes, as well for energy of expression as for

¹ Hannah More (1745-1833), one of the most popular writers of her time. She commenced literary life as a friend of Dr. Johnson, of Garrick, and of Horace Walpole, and also as a playwright. But a change came over her by the reading of John Newton's *Cardiphonia*, and henceforth her work was devoted to philanthropy and to the furthering of evangelical religious movements. She made her principal reputation by her efforts on behalf of Sunday schools, and by her various tracts, known as the 'Cheap Repository Tracts,' in which we are introduced to the famous

the tendency of the design. I have never yet seen any production of her pen that has not recommended itself by both these qualifications. There is likewise much good sense in her manner of treating every subject, and no mere poetic cant (which is the thing that I abhor) in her manner of treating any. And this I say, not because you now know and visit her, but it has long been my avowed opinion of her works, which I have both spoken and written, as often as I have had occasion to mention them.

Mr. Wilberforce's¹ little book (if he was the author of it) has also charmed me. It must, I should imagine, engage the notice of those to whom it is addressed. In that case one may say to them, either answer it, or be set down by it! They will do neither. They will approve, commend, and forget it. Such has been the fate of all exhortations to reform, whether in verse or prose, and however closely pressed upon the conscience, in all ages. Here and there a happy individual, to whom God gives grace and wisdom to profit by the admonition, is the better for it. But the aggregate body (as Gilbert Cooper² used to call the multitude)

'Shepherd of Salisbury Plain,' who, although having to support a family on one shilling a day, never complained of hunger, because he 'lived upon the promises.' Her books, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (at first attributed to Wilberforce) and *Slavery, a Poem*, were both published this year—1788. Hannah More was a friend of Macaulay's childhood, and she touches the history of literature at many points although her own work is practically dead. There are two lengthy biographies of her, of which there is an excellent summary by Sir Leslie Stephen in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹ William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the philanthropist. See Letter of 19th March 1788.

² John Gilbert Cooper (1723-1769), a writer on æsthetics, author of a life of Socrates—educated at Westminster School, and for that reason probably well known to Cowper.

remain, though with a very good understanding of the matter, like horse and mule that have none.

We shall now soon lose our neighbours at the Hall. We shall truly miss them, and long for their return. Mr. Throckmorton said to me last night, with sparkling eyes, and a face expressive of the highest pleasure — ‘We compared you this morning with Pope; we read your fourth *Iliad* and his, and I verily think we shall beat him. He has many superfluous lines, and does not interest one. When I read your translation, I am deeply affected. I see plainly your advantage, and am convinced that Pope spoiled all by attempting the work in rhyme.’ His brother George, who is my most active amanuensis, and who indeed first introduced the subject, seconded all he said. More would have passed, but Mrs. Throckmorton having seated herself at the harpsichord, and for my amusement merely, my attention was of course turned to her. The new vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value.

W. C.

TO GENERAL COWPER

Weston, 1788.

MY DEAR GENERAL,—A letter is not pleasant which excites curiosity, but does not gratify it. Such a letter was my last, the defects of which I therefore take the first opportunity to supply. When the condition of our negroes in the islands was first presented to me as a subject for songs, I felt myself not at all allured to the undertaking: it seemed to offer only images of horror, which could by no

means be accommodated to the style of that sort of composition. But having a desire to comply, if possible, with the request made to me, after turning the matter in my mind as many ways as I could, I, at last, as I told you, produced three,¹ and that which appears to myself the best of those three, I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious,—in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous. If I could think them worth your seeing, I would, as opportunity should occur, send them also. If this amuses you, I shall be glad.

W. C.

TO MRS. HILL

March 17, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—A thousand thanks to you for your obliging and most acceptable present, which I received safe this evening. Had you known my occasions, you could not possibly have timed it more exactly. The Throckmorton family, who live in our neighbourhood, and who sometimes take a dinner with us, were, by engagement made with them two or three days ago, appointed to dine with us just at the time when your turkey will be in perfection. A turkey from Wargrave, the residence of my friend, and a turkey, as I conclude, of your breeding, stands a fair chance, in my

¹ Cowper wrote in all *five* Slave Ballads :—

1. The Morning Dream.
2. Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce.
3. *A poem that is lost.*
4. The Negro's Complaint.
5. Pity for Poor Africans.

account, to excel all other turkeys; and the ham, its companion, will be no less welcome.

I shall be happy to hear that my friend Joseph has recovered entirely from his late indisposition, which I was informed was gout; a distemper which, however painful in itself, brings at least some comfort with it, both for the patient and those who love him, the hope of length of days, and an exemption from numerous other evils. I wish him just so much of it as may serve for a confirmation of this hope, and not one twinge more.

Your husband, my dear Madam, told me, some time since, that a certain library of mine, concerning which I have heard no other tidings these five and twenty years, is still in being. Hue and cry have been made after it in Old Palace Yard, but hitherto in vain. If he can inform a bookless student in what region or in what nook his long-lost volumes may be found, he will render me an important service.

I am likely to be furnished soon with shelves, which my cousin of New Norfolk Street is about to send me; but furniture for these shelves I shall not presently procure, unless by recovering my stray authors. I am not young enough to think of making a new collection, and shall probably possess myself of few books hereafter but such as I may put forth myself, which cost me nothing but what I can better spare than money—time and consideration.

I beg, my dear Madam, that you will give my love to my friend, and believe me, with the warmest sense of his and your kindness, Your most obliged and affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 17, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The evening is almost worn away, while I have been writing a letter, to which I was obliged to give immediate attention. An application from a lady, and backed by you, could not be less than irresistible; that lady, too, a daughter of Mr. Thornton's. Neither are these words of course: since I returned to Homer in good earnest, I turn out of my way for no consideration that I can possibly put aside.

With modern tunes I am unacquainted, and have therefore accommodated my verse to an old one; not so old, however, but that there will be songsters found old enough to remember it. The song is an admirable one for which it was made, and, though political, nearly, if not quite, as serious as mine. On such a subject as I had before me, it seems impossible not to be serious. I shall be happy if it meet with your and Lady Balgonie's approbation.

Of Mr. Bean I could say much; but have only time at present to say that I esteem and love him. On some future occasion I shall speak of him more at large.

We rejoice that Mrs. Newton is better, and wish nothing more than her complete recovery. Dr. Ford¹ is to be pitied. His wife, I suppose, is going to heaven; a journey which she can better afford to take, than he to part with her.—I am, my dear friend, with our united love to you all three, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

¹ Possibly Edward Ford (1746-1809), surgeon to the Westminster Dispensary 1780-1801.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT¹

March 19, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The spring is come, but not, I suppose, that spring which our poets have celebrated. So I judge at least by the extreme severity of the season, sunless skies and freezing blasts, surpassing all that we experienced in the depth of winter. How do you dispose of yourself in this howling month of March? As for me, I walk daily, be the weather what it may, take bark, and write verses. By the aid of such means as these, I combat the north-east wind with some measure of success, and look forward, with the hope of enjoying it, to the warmth of summer.

Have you seen a little volume lately published, entitled *The Manners of the Great*? It is said to have been written by Mr. Wilberforce,² but whether actually written by him or not, is undoubtedly the work of some man intimately acquainted with the subject, a gentleman and a man of letters. If it makes the impression on those to whom it is addressed, that may be in some degree expected from his arguments, and from his manner of pressing them, it will be well. But you and I have lived long enough in the world to know, that the hope of a general reformation in any class of men whatever, or of women either, may easily be too sanguine.

I have now given the last revisal to as much of my translation as was ready for it, and do not know that I shall bestow another single stroke of my pen on that part of it before I send it to the press. My

¹ *The Morning Dream* accompanied this letter.² Hannah More wrote it.

business at present is with the sixteenth book, in which I have made some progress, but have not yet actually sent forth Patroclus to the battle. My first translation lies always before me; line by line I examine it as I proceed, and line by line reject it. I do not however hold myself altogether indebted to my critics for the better judgment that I seem to exercise in this matter now than in the first instance. By long study of him, I am in fact become much more familiar with Homer than at any time heretofore, and have possessed myself of such a taste of his manner, as is not to be attained by mere cursory reading for amusement. But alas! it is after all a mortifying consideration, that the majority of my judges hereafter will be no judges of this. *Græcum est, non potest legi*, is a motto that would suit nine in ten of those who will give themselves airs about it, and pretend to like or to dislike. No matter. I know I shall please *you*, because I know *what* pleases you, and am sure that I have done it. Adieu! my good friend.—Ever affectionately yours, W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, March 29, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I rejoice that you have so successfully performed so long a journey without the aid of hoofs or wheels. I do not know that a journey on foot exposes a man to more disasters than a carriage or a horse; perhaps it may be the safer way of travelling, but the novelty of it impressed me with some anxiety on your account.

It seems almost incredible to myself that my company should be at all desirable to you, or to

any man. I know so little of the world as it goes at present, and labour generally under such a depression of spirits, especially at those times when I could wish to be most cheerful, that my own share in every conversation appears to me to be the most insipid thing imaginable. But you say you found it otherwise, and I will not for my own sake doubt your sincerity : *de gustibus non est disputandum*, and since such is yours, I shall leave you in quiet possession of it, wishing indeed both its continuance and increase. I shall not find a properer place in which to say, accept of Mrs. Unwin's acknowledgments, as well as mine, for the kindness of your expressions on this subject, and be assured of an undissembling welcome at all times, when it shall suit you to give us your company at Weston. As to her, she is one of the sincerest of the human race, and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one.

It is almost time to tell you that I have received the books safe, they have not suffered the least detriment by the way, and I am much obliged to you for them. If my translation should be a little delayed in consequence of this favour of yours, you must take the blame on yourself. It is impossible not to read the notes of a commentator so learned, so judicious, and of so fine a taste as Dr. Clarke,¹ having him at one's elbow. Though he has been but a few hours under my roof, I have already peeped at him, and find that he will be *instar omnium*

¹ Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729). His edition of *Homer* appeared in 1729.

to me. They are such notes exactly as I wanted. A translator of Homer should ever have somebody at hand to say, 'that's a beauty,' lest he should slumber where his author does not; not only depreciating, by such inadvertency, the work of his original, but depriving perhaps his own of an embellishment which wanted only to be noticed.

If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands, they are probably mine. I was lately applied to for assistance in that way by a society of gentlemen, enlisted in that laudable service. I have sent them [three]; two are serious, and one is not so. Of the former, one is called the *Negro's Complaint*, and one, the *Morning Dream*. The latter is entitled, *Sweet meat has sour sauce, or the slave trader in his dumps*. The subject, as a subject for song, did not strike me much, but the application was from a quarter that might command me, and the occasion itself, whatever difficulties might attend it, offered pleas that were irresistible.

It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble. I fear, however, that the attempt will fail. The tidings which have lately reached me from London concerning it are not the most encouraging. While the matter slept, or was but slightly adverted to, the English only had their share of shame in common with other nations on account of it. But since it has been canvassed and searched to the bottom,—since the public attention has been riveted to the horrible scheme,—we can no longer plead either that we did not know it, or did not think of it. Woe be to us, if we refuse the poor captives the redress to

which they have so clear a right, and prove ourselves in the sight of God and men indifferent to all considerations but those of gain.—Adieu, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 31, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Mrs. Throckmorton has promised to write to me. I beg that as often as you shall see her you will give her a smart pinch, and say, ‘Have you written to my cousin?’ I build all my hopes of her performance on this expedient, and for so doing these my letters, not patent, shall be your sufficient warrant. You are thus to give her the question till she shall answer, ‘Yes.’

I have written one more song, and sent it. It is called the *Morning Dream*,¹ and may be sung to the tune of Tweed-Side, or any other tune that will suit it, for I am not nice on that subject. I would have copied it for you, had I not almost filled my sheet without it; but now, my dear, you must stay till the sweet sirens of London shall bring it to you, or if that happy day should never arrive, I hereby acknowledge myself your debtor to that amount. I shall now probably cease to sing of tortured negroes, a theme which never pleased me, but which in the hope of doing them some little service, I was not unwilling to handle.

If any thing could have raised Miss More to a higher place in my opinion than she possessed before, it could only be your information that, after all, she, and not Mr. Wilberforce, is author of that volume. How comes it to pass that she, being a

¹ Globe Edition, p. 363.

woman, writes with a force, and energy, and a correctness hitherto arrogated by the men, and not very frequently displayed even by the men themselves!—Adieu,

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, April 11, 1788

DEAR MADAM,—The melancholy that I have mentioned, and concerning which you are so kind as to inquire, is of a kind, so far as I know, peculiar to myself. It does not at all affect the operations of my mind on any subject to which I can attach it, whether serious or ludicrous, or whatsoever it may be; for which reason I am almost always employed either in reading or writing, when I am not engaged in conversation. A vacant hour is my abhorrence; because, when I am not occupied, I suffer under the whole influence of my unhappy temperament. I thank you for your recommendation of a medicine from which you have received benefit yourself; but there is hardly any thing that I have not proved, however beneficial it may have been found by others, in my own case utterly useless. I have, therefore, long since bid adieu to all hope from human means,—the means excepted of perpetual employment.

I will not say that we shall never meet, because it is not for a creature who knows not what shall be to-morrow, to assert any thing positively concerning the future. Things more unlikely I have yet seen brought to pass, and things which, if I had expressed my opinion of them at all, I should have said were impossible. But being respectively circumstanced as we are, there seems no present probability of it. You speak of insuperable hin-

drances; and I also have hindrances that would be equally difficult to surmount. One is, that I never ride, that I am not able to perform a journey on foot, and that chaises do not roll within the sphere of that economy which my circumstances oblige me to observe. If this were not of itself sufficient to excuse me, when I decline so obliging an invitation as yours, I could mention yet other obstacles. But to what end? One impracticability makes as effectual a barrier as a thousand. It will be otherwise in other worlds. Either we shall not bear about us a body, or it will be more easily transportable than this. In the mean time, by the help of the post, strangers to each other may cease to be such, as you and I have already begun to experience.

It is indeed, madam, as you say, a foolish world, and likely to continue such till the Great Teacher shall himself vouchsafe to make it wiser. I am persuaded that time alone will never mend it. But there is doubtless a day appointed when there shall be a more general manifestation of the beauty of holiness than mankind have ever yet beheld. When that period shall arrive, there will be an end of profane representations, whether of heaven or hell, on the stage. The great realities will supersede them.

I have just discovered that I have written to you on paper so transparent, that it will hardly keep the contents a secret. Excuse the mistake, and believe me, dear madam, with my respects to Mr. King, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, April 12, 1788.

MY DEAREST COZ,—It is late in the evening and I have only time to tell you that this day, just after

dinner, the expected shelves or chiffonieres arrived. I have already furnished that which occupies a place in my study with about a dozen gay books of my own, and with Homers, Greek and English, that are not my own. People will now see that it is not called a study for nothing, which never was the case till now. (A thousand thanks to you, my dear, for this neat addition to our *meubles*, which harmonises exactly with the rest.) These, like many other contrivances which administer to the comfort of life, have been invented since I saw the world, and, but for you, I should have died ignorant of their existence, but having now seen them, I see plainly too that I shall not be able to live without them hereafter.

I have Burns's poems by the gift of my lately acquired friend Mr. Rose, who knows those who know the author. It is true that he was a ploughman when he composed them; but being a ploughman in Scotland, where the lowest of the people have yet some benefits of education, makes the wonderment on that account the less. His poetical talent has, however, done that for *him*, which such a talent has done for few; it has mended his circumstances, and of a ploughman has made him a farmer. I think him an extraordinary genius, and the facility with which he rhymes and versifies in a kind of measure not in itself very easy to execute, appears to me remarkable. But at the same time both his measure and his language are so terribly barbarous, that though he has some humour, and more good sense, he is not a pleasing poet to an English reader, nor do I think him worth your purchasing. Some time or other, surely, we shall

see you at Weston, and then you will have an opportunity to taste for yourself, gratis. They came into my hands at a time when I was perfectly idle, and being so, had an opportunity to study his language, of which by the help of a glossary at the book's tail, I made myself master. But he whose hands are not as vacant as mine were at that moment, must have more resolution than I naturally possess, or he will never account it worth his while to study a dialect so disgusting.

Half a dozen times since I have been writing I have turned my eyes from the paper to squint at the chiffonier.

Had I not supposed that ere now my songs would have greeted your ears, your eyes would probably have seen them. It is possible that my suitors for that assistance may choose not to avail themselves of it till next winter. In which case I will continue to send them to you in the interim. To the General I have already sent twain, and in the only letter I have had from him since he received the first, he tells me that he was very much pleased with it. Adieu, my dear.—I am ever thy most affectionate coz,

WM. COWPER.

(*N.B.*—Your present suffered not the least damage in the journey.)

TO GENERAL COWPER

Weston Underwood, April 14, 1788.

MY DEAR GENERAL,—Lest any mistake should have happened which you cannot otherwise be aware of, I thought it necessary to inform you that no hamper has yet arrived. Sometimes our parcels

have been carried to the wrong inn. The Windmill in St. John Street is that from which ours sets out, and the best time to send is Tuesday night or Wednesday morning early, else the waggon perhaps is loaded and the parcel left to another opportunity. I hope that your eye is so much better that you will be able to read what follows without distressing it, otherwise it will cost you much more than it is worth. [Then follows *The Negro's Complaint*.¹] Lady Hesketh sent me this last week two neat little pieces of furniture which she calls chiffoniers. What the word means I am not Frenchman enough to discover, but I have filled one of them with books, having only so many as will fill one of them. My own volumes make a conspicuous figure among them, and put me in mind of a line of Pope's, which not having seen these thirty years perhaps I may quote amiss:—

‘ His books, a slender store—

His own works neatly bound, and little more.’

When I left London my library vanished. It was not sold with my furniture, but what became of it nobody seems to know. He that writes so much, however, and reads so little, may best shift without them.—I am, my dear cousin, with my love to Mrs. Cowper, most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

April 19, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for your last, and for the verses in particular, therein contained;

¹ The word which in all editions of Cowper's poems is printed *matches* should be *fetters*. (Stanza 4.)

in which there is not only rhyme but reason. And yet I fear that neither you nor I, with all our reasoning and rhiming, shall effect much good in this matter. So far as I can learn, and I have had intelligence from a quarter within the reach of such as is respectable, our governors are not animated altogether with such heroic ardour as the occasion might inspire. They consult frequently indeed in the cabinet about it; but the frequency of their consultations, in a case so plain as this would be (did not what Shakespeare calls commodity, and what we call political expediency, cast a cloud over it), rather bespeaks a desire to save appearances, than to interpose to purpose. Laws will, I suppose, be enacted for the more humane treatment of the negroes; but who shall see to the execution of them? The planters will not, and the negroes cannot. In fact, we know that laws of this tendency have not been wanting, enacted even amongst themselves; but there has been always a want of prosecutors, or righteous judges; deficiencies which will not be very easily supplied. The newspapers have lately told us, that these merciful masters have, on this occasion, been occupied in passing ordinances, by which the lives and limbs of their slaves are to be secured from wanton cruelty hereafter. But who does not immediately detect the artifice, or can give them a moment's credit for any thing more than a design, by this show of lenity, to avert the storm which they think hangs over them? On the whole, I fear there is reason to wish, for the honour of England, that the nuisance had never been troubled; lest we eventually make ourselves justly chargeable with the whole offence by

not removing it. The enormity cannot be palliated ; we can no longer plead that we were not aware of it, or that our attention was otherwise engaged ; and shall be inexcusable, therefore, ourselves, if we leave the least part of it unredressed. Such arguments as Pharaoh might have used to justify his destruction of the Israelites, substituting only sugar for bricks, may lie ready for our use also ; but I think we can find no better.

The vicarage at Olney begins once more to assume a comfortable aspect. Our new neighbours there are of a character exactly suited to our wish, conversible, peaceable, amiable. We drank tea there yesterday ; the first opportunity we have had of doing so ; they, having waived all unnecessary ceremonials, drank tea with us the day before. I had made several calls on them at noon, and Mr. Bean several here in the evening ; but dirty ways, high winds, rain, or snow had always interposed to prevent a meeting between the ladies. Mr. Bean has made a notable journey to Oxford, in company with Thomas Bull. It is hardly fair to anticipate him in the account which he will doubtless give you of it himself, neither have I room to say much about it. I will only just mention, that having but one horse between them, they availed themselves of him in every possible way. Mr. Bean having walked till he could walk no longer, mounted behind, but finding himself incommoded in the straddle that the horse's hips required, changed places with Mr. Bull ; he thenceforth rode behind, in the side-saddle fashion, with both legs on a side, and thus they proceeded till they came near to Oxford.

We are tolerably well, and shall rejoice to hear

that, as the year rises, Mrs. Newton's health keeps pace with it. We expect Mr. and Mrs. Powley soon, but take it for granted, as they are gone first to Laytonstone, that him, at least, you will see before we shall see him.—Accept our best love to your whole trio, and believe me, my dear friend, affectionately and truly yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston Lodge, May 1, 1788.

MY DEAREST CUZZY-WUZZY,—Behold the pill new made and the dose more brightly gilded! May the patient be much the better for it, and the apothecary and nurse well paid. Then you and I shall have no cause to complain.

I have lately sent you nothing but scraps instead of letters, but I shall soon grow more prolix, having more to communicate than the time will at this present writing allow. Mrs. Frog told you indeed the truth. I have had a letter from her, the brevity of which was the only cause of complaint with which it furnished me; though even of that I made no complaint in my answer to it, having too much Christian consideration of her various and multifarious engagements to be so unreasonable. They have been now a month in London, and if she and Mr. Frog are men of their word, another month brings them back again.

I told you that I admire Mrs. Maitland's Muse, and I told you the truth; she has no need to fear a critical eye, an eye at least that is truly such. There are several very beautiful turns of expression and versification in the copy, and the whole is good.

Perhaps instead of *gay Hope* (an epithet that does not seem exactly to suit a hope of the religious kind) I should substitute some other term; and I know not that my fault-finding faculty discovers any other speck to lay its finger on.

To copy my verses enclosed, and to scribble this morsel, is all that I am able to do before breakfast. Give my love and thanks to Mrs. Maitland when you write to her, and trust me, my dearest coz, that with ardent wishes to see thee in the beautiful scenes with which I am here surrounded, I am ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, May 6, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—You ask me how I like Smollett's *Don Quixote*? I answer, well,—perhaps better than any body's; but having no skill in the original, some diffidence becomes me. That is to say, I do not know whether I *ought* to prefer it or not. Yet there is so little deviation from other versions of it which I have seen, that I do not much hesitate. It has made me laugh I know immoderately, and in such a case *ça suffit*.

A thousand thanks, my dear, for the new convenience in the way of stowage which you are so kind as to intend me. There is nothing in which I am so deficient as repositories for letters, papers, and litter of all sorts. Your last present has helped me somewhat; but not with respect to such things as require lock and key, which are numerous. A

box therefore so secured will be to me an invaluable acquisition. And since you leave me to my option, what shall be the size thereof, I of course prefer a folio. On the back of the book-seeming box some artist, expert in those matters, may inscribe these words,

Collectanea curiosa.

The English of which is, a collection of curiosities. A title which I prefer to all others, because if I live, I shall take care that the box shall merit it; and because it will operate as an incentive to open that, which being locked cannot be opened. For in these cases the greater the balk, the more wit is discovered by the ingenious contriver of it, viz. myself.

The General, I understand by his last letter, is in town. In my last to him, I told him news; possibly it will give you pleasure, and ought for that reason to be made known to you as soon as possible. My friend Rowley, who I told you has, after twenty-five years' silence, renewed his correspondence with me, and who now lives in Ireland, where he has many and considerable connections, has sent to me for thirty subscription papers. Rowley is one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world, and will, I dare say, do all in his power to serve me.

I am just recovered from a violent cold, attended by a cough, which split my head while it lasted. I escaped these tortures all the winter, but whose constitution, or what skin, can possibly be proof against our vernal breezes in England? Mine never were, nor will be.

When people are intimate, we say they are as great as two inkle-weavers, on which expression I have to remark in the first place, that the word *great* is here used in a sense which the corresponding term has not, so far as I know, in any other language,—and secondly, that inkle-weavers contract intimacies with each other sooner than other people, on account of their juxtaposition in weaving of inkle. Hence it is that Mr. Gregson and I emulate those happy weavers in the closeness of our connection. We live near to each other, and while the Hall is empty are each other's only extraforaneous comfort.—Most truly thine,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Weston, May 8, 1788.

ALAS! my library!—I must now give it up for a lost thing for ever. The only consolation belonging to the circumstance is, or seems to be, that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or can ever befall me again. As far as books are concerned I am

Totus, teres atque rotundus,

and may set fortune at defiance. The books which had been my father's had most of them his arms on the inside cover, but the rest no mark, neither his name nor mine. I could mourn for them like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing.

You will oblige me much by sending me *Crazy*

Kate.¹ A gentleman last winter promised me both her and the *Lacemaker*, but he went to London, that place in which, as in the grave, 'all things are forgotten,' and I have never seen either of them.

I begin to find some prospect of a conclusion, of the *Iliad* at least, now opening upon me, having reached the eighteenth book. Your letter found me yesterday in the very act of dispersing the whole host of Troy by the voice only of Achilles. There is nothing extravagant in the idea, for you have witnessed a similar effect attending even such a voice as mine at midnight, from a garret window, on the dogs of a whole parish, whom I have put to flight in a moment. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, May 12, 1788.

It is probable, my dearest coz, that I shall not be able to write much, but as much as I can I will. The time between rising and breakfast is all that I can at present find, and this morning I lay longer than usual.

In the style of the lady's note to you I can easily perceive a smatch of her character. Neither men nor women write with such neatness of expression, who have not given a good deal of attention to language, and qualified themselves by study. At the same time it gave me much more pleasure to observe that my coz, though not standing on the pinnacle of renown quite so elevated as that

¹ *Crazy Kate*.—The original of *Crazy Kate* was probably Elizabeth Robinson, known in Olney as 'Poor Bet Robinson.' Her reason partly returned to her. She died at Olney in April 1821, aged sixty-five years. See letter of 24th May 1788 and *The Task*, Book i.

which lifts Mrs. Montagu¹ to the clouds, falls in no degree short of her in this particular; so that should she make you a member of her academy, she will do it honour. Suspect me not of flattering you, for I abhor the thought; neither *will* you suspect it. Recollect that it is an invariable rule with me, never to pay compliments to those I love.

Two days, *en suite*, I have walked to Gayhurst; a longer journey than I have walked on foot these seventeen years. The first day I went alone, designing merely to make the experiment, and choosing to be at liberty to return at whatsoever point of my pilgrimage I should find myself fatigued. For I was not without suspicion that years, and some other things no less injurious than years, viz. melancholy and distress of mind, might by this time have unfitted me for such achievements. But I found it otherways. I reached the church, which stands, as you know, in the garden, in fifty-five minutes, and returned in ditto time to Weston. The next day I took the same walk with Mr. Powley, having a desire to show him the prettiest place in the country. I not only performed these two excursions without injury to my health, but have by means of them gained indisputable proof that my ambulatory faculty is not yet impaired; a discovery which, considering that to my feet alone I am likely, as I have ever been, to be indebted always for my transportation from place to place, I find very delectable.

You will find in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a

¹ Mrs. Montagu (1720-1800), friend of Lady Hesketh and author of various works. The Blue Stocking Club met at her house in Leicester Square. See poem, Globe Edition, p. 360.

sonnet, addressed to Henry Cowper, signed 'T. H.'¹ I am the writer of it. No creature knows this but yourself; you will make what use of the intelligence you shall see good. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, May 19, 1788.

TRUE, as you say, my coz, praise not sounded forth is lost, and the subject of it not at all advantaged. But the question is, shall we publish our eulogium on Mrs. Montagu in a newspaper or in the *Gentleman's Magazine*? Let us consider the matter: a newspaper perhaps has more readers than Mr. Urban, yet Mr. Urban has many, and a majority of them are literary men. No single newspaper possibly is read by so many of the literati as the publications of Mr. Urban,—not to mention that he is perused by multitudes of blockheads besides. Again, a newspaper dies with the day, and its contents in general die with it. Not so the *Gentleman's Magazine*. There are multitudes who perpetuate the long series of his labours, who deliver them down to posterity; one generation consigns them over to another, and they are consequently immortal. For these reasons, therefore, I deem a compliment paid in a magazine twice as good as the same compliment would be, paid in a newspaper; especially considering that there is at least a chance that some daily paper may enrich itself with a copy of said compliment, stealing it from the Magazine, a practice not unfrequent. Thus far I have considered only Mrs. Montagu's interest in the affair; but I do not

¹ 'Cowper, whose silver voice,' etc., p. 359 Globe Edition.

mean altogether to overlook my own concern in it. One good turn deserves another : Mr. Urban was not sparing either of his labours or his commendations in giving an account of the *Task*. On the contrary, he has bestowed on it a larger portion of both than any of his brother reviewers. I account myself, therefore, in some sort bound to give him now and then a proof that I am not insensible of the obligation, by sending him such scraps as the more weighty business of translating Homer will permit me to produce.

All these reasons maturely weighed, a decision seems to result from them in favour of the Magazine. But after all, I refer the whole to your arbitration. If in your next you should tell me that you are of my mind, I will transmit a copy immediately to Mr. Nichols, informing him at the same time that they are by the author of the *Task*. Shouldst thou differ from me, thou wilt then do well to send them thyself to any newspaper which thou approvest most.

It is generally a rule with me in writing to you, to forget what is most important. Accordingly, I forgot to tell you of Lord Cowper's kindness. I was not aware of my obligations to Henry ; neither did I at all suspect that he had given his Lordship a jog on the occasion. Of course, when I answered his letter, I made him no acknowledgment on that behalf. I therefore entreat thee to be proxy for me, and when you see him next, to thank him heartily on my part for his friendly and seasonable intercession.

I also forgot to tell thee, that in a squabble that has fallen out between Maurice Smith and Mrs. Marriot of the Swan, concerning the post office, viz.

who should have the management of it, the new plan of a daily post has dropped to the ground, and we now have our letters only three times in the week, as usual.

I beg that you will give my love to Mrs. Frog, and tell her it is time she were gone to Bucklands. According to my reckoning, which I know to be very exact, she has already stayed her allotted time in London, where if she still continues frisking about heedless how time goes, and is after all to take a frisk to Bucklands also, I shall be glad to know when we are likely to see her at the Hall again? It is true that northernly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales in every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too, but not by choice, thine is an absence of necessity. The Wilderness is now in all its beauty: I would that thou wert here to enjoy it. Our guests leave us to-morrow. Fare thee well. Thanks for the two lists of subscribers, and for Mr. Vickery's most admirable puff.—Yours, my dearest, ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

May 24, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledgments. I cannot say that poor Kate resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in the

Task, and has a face exceedingly expressive of despairing melancholy. The lacemaker is accidentally a good likeness of a young woman, once our neighbour, who was hardly less handsome than the picture twenty years ago; but the loss of one husband, and the acquisition of another, have since that time impaired her much; yet she might still be supposed to have sat to the artist.

We dined yesterday with your friend and mine, the most companionable and domestic Mr. Chester.¹ The whole kingdom can hardly furnish a spectacle more pleasing to a man who has a taste for true happiness, than himself, Mrs. Chester, and their multitudinous family. Seven long miles are interposed between us, or perhaps I should oftener have an opportunity of declaiming on this subject.

I am now in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad*, and on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles, as make all other achievements trivial. I may well exclaim, O for a muse of fire! especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also; much however may be done, when Homer leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a business, even though all the nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient, for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam.

I saw at Mr. Chester's a great curiosity; an antique bust of Paris in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood in Helen's chamber. It was in fact brought from the

¹ Of Chicheley.

Levant, and though not well mended (for it had suffered much by time) is an admirable performance.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

May 25, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Ask possibilities, and they shall be performed; but ask not hymns from a man suffering by despair as I do. I could not sing the Lord's song were it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from His presence, in comparison with which the distance from east to west is no distance,—is vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either in prose or verse, allow myself to express a frame of mind which I am conscious does not belong to me; least of all can I venture to use the language of absolute resignation, lest only counterfeiting, I should for that very reason be taken strictly at my word, and lose all my remaining comfort. Can there not be found among those translations of Madame Guyon, somewhat that might serve the purpose? I should think there might. Submission to the will of Christ, my memory tells me, is a theme that pervades them all. If so, your request is performed already; and if any alteration in them should be necessary, I will with all my heart make it. I have no objection to giving the graces of the foreigner an English dress, but insuperable ones to all false pretences and affected exhibitions of what I do not feel.

Hoping that you will have the grace to be resigned most perfectly to this disappointment, which you should not have suffered had it been in my

power to prevent it, I remain, with our best remembrances to Mr. Thornton, ever affectionately yours,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, May 27, 1788.

MY DEAR COZ,—The General, in a letter which came yesterday, sent me enclosed a copy of my sonnet; thus introducing it.

‘I send a copy of verses somebody has written in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April last. Independent of my partiality towards the subject, I think the lines themselves are good.’

Thus it appears that my poetical adventure has succeeded to my wish, and I write to him by this post, on purpose to inform him that the somebody in question is myself.

I no longer wonder that Mrs. Montagu stands at the head of all that is called learned, and that every critic veils his bonnet to her superior judgment. I am now reading, and have reached the middle of, her Essay on the Genius of Shakespeare, a book of which, strange as it may seem, though I must have read it formerly, I had absolutely forgot the existence.

The learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it, fully justify not only my compliment, but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents, or shall be paid hereafter. Voltaire, I doubt not, rejoiced that his antagonist wrote in English, and that his countrymen could not possibly be judges of the dispute. Could they have known how much she

was in the right, and by how many thousand miles the bard of Avon is superior to all their dramatists, the French critic would have lost half his fame among them.

I saw at Mr. Chester's a head of Paris ; an antique of Parian marble. His uncle, who left him the estate, brought it, as I understand, from the Levant : you may suppose I viewed it with all the enthusiasm that belongs to a translator of Homer. It is in reality a great curiosity, and highly valuable.

Our friend Sephus has sent me two prints, the *Lacemaker* and *Crazy Kate*. These also I have contemplated with pleasure, having, as you know, a particular interest in them. The former of them is not more beautiful than a lacemaker, once our neighbour at Olney ; though the artist has assembled as many charms in her countenance as I ever saw in any countenance, one excepted. Kate is both younger and handsomer than the original from which I drew, but she is in a good style, and as mad as need be.

How does this hot weather suit thee, my dear, in London ? As for me, with all my colonnades and bowers, I am quite oppressed by it. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 3, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—The excessive heat of these last few days was indeed oppressive ; but excepting the languor that it occasioned both in my mind and body, it was far from being prejudicial to me. It opened ten thousand pores,

by which as many mischiefs, the effects of long obstruction, began to breathe themselves forth abundantly. Then came an east wind, baneful to me at all times, but following so closely such a sultry season, uncommonly noxious. To speak in the seaman's phrase, not entirely strange to you, *I was taken all aback*; and the humours which would have escaped, if old Eurus would have given them leave, finding every door shut, have fallen into my eyes. But in a country like this, poor miserable mortals must be content to suffer all that sudden and violent changes can inflict; and if they are quit for about half the plagues that Caliban calls down on Prospero, they may say we are well off, and dance for joy, if the rheumatism or cramp will let them.

Did you ever see an advertisement by one Fowle, a dancing-master of Newport Pagnell? If not, I will contrive to send it to you for your amusement. It is the most extravagantly ludicrous affair of the kind I ever saw. The author of it had the good hap to be crazed, or he had never produced any thing half so clever; for you will ever observe, that they who are said to have lost their wits, have more than other people. It is therefore only a slander, with which envy prompts the malignity of persons in their senses to asperse wittier than themselves. But there are countries in the world, where the mad have justice done them, where they are revered as the subjects of inspiration, and consulted as oracles. Poor Fowle would have made a figure there.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 5, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is a comfort to me that you are so kind as to make allowance for me, in consideration of my being so busy a man. The truth is, that could I write with both hands, and with both at the same time, verse with one and prose with the other, I should not even so be able to dispatch both my poetry and my arrears of correspondence faster than I have need. The only opportunities that I can find for conversing with distant friends, are in the early hour (and that sometimes reduced to half a one) before breakfast. Neither am I exempt from hindrances, which, while they last, are insurmountable; especially one, by which I have been occasionally a sufferer all my life. I mean an inflammation of the eyes; a malady under which I have lately laboured, and from which I am at this moment only in a small degree relieved. The last sudden change of the weather, from heat almost insupportable to a cold as severe as is commonly felt in mid-winter, would have disabled me entirely for all sorts of scribbling, had I not favoured the weak part a little, and given my eyes a respite.

It is certain that we do not live far from Olney, but, small as the distance is, it has too often the effect of a separation between the Beans and us. He is a man with whom, when I can converse at all, I can converse on terms perfectly agreeable to myself; who does not distress me with forms, nor yet disgust me by the neglect of them; whose

manners are easy and natural, and his observations always sensible. I often, therefore, wish them nearer neighbours.

We have heard nothing of the Powleys since they left us, a fortnight ago ; and should be uneasy at their silence on such an occasion, did we not know that she cannot write, and that he, on his first return to his parish after a long absence, may possibly find it difficult. Her we found much improved in her health and spirits, and him, as always, affectionate and obliging. It was an agreeable visit, and, as it was ordered for me, I happened to have better spirits than I have enjoyed at any time since.

I shall rejoice if your friend Mr. Phillips, influenced by what you told him of my present engagements, shall waive his application to me for a poem on the slave-trade. I account myself honoured by his intention to solicit me on the subject, and it would give me pain to refuse him, which inevitably I shall be constrained to do. The more I have considered it, the more I have convinced myself that it is not a promising theme for verse. General censure on the iniquity of the practice will avail nothing. The world has been overwhelmed with such remarks already, and to particularise all the horrors of it were an employment for the mind both of the poet and his readers, of which they would necessarily soon grow weary. For my own part, I cannot contemplate the subject very nearly, without a degree of abhorrence that affects my spirits, and sinks them below the pitch requisite for success in verse. Lady Hesketh recommended it to me some months since, and then

I declined it for these reasons, and for others which need not be mentioned here.

I return you many thanks for all your intelligence concerning the success of the gospel in far countries, and shall rejoice in a sight of Mr. Van Lier's¹ letter, which, being so voluminous, I think you should bring with you, when you can take your flight to Weston, rather than commit to any other conveyance.

Remember that it is now summer, and that the summer flies fast, and that we shall be happy to see you and yours, as speedily and for as long a time as you can afford. We are sorry, truly so, that Mrs Newton is so frequently and so much indisposed. Accept our best love to you both, and to your good niece Betsy, and believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

After what I have said on the subject of my writing engagements, I doubt not but you will excuse my transcribing the verses to Mrs. Montagu, especially considering that my eyes are weary with what I have written this morning already. I feel somewhat like an impropriety in referring you to the next *Gentleman's Magazine*; but at the present juncture I know not how to do better.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Weston, June 8, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter brought me the very first intelligence of the event² it mentions. My last letter from Lady Hesketh gave me reason

¹ See letter of 14th June 1790.

² Death of Ashley Cowper, Lady Hesketh's father.

enough to expect it, but the certainty of it was unknown to me till I learned it by your information. If gradual decline, the consequence of great age, be a sufficient preparation of the mind to encounter such a loss, our minds were certainly prepared to meet it: yet to you I need not say that no preparation can supersede the feelings of the heart on such occasions. While our friends yet live inhabitants of the same world with ourselves, they seem still to live to *us*; we are sure that they sometimes think of us; and however improbable it may seem, it is never impossible that we may see each other once again. But the grave, like a great gulf, swallows all such expectation, and in the moment when a beloved friend sinks into it, a thousand tender recollections awaken a regret, that will be felt in spite of all reasonings, and let our warnings have been what they may. Thus it is I take my last leave of poor Ashley, whose heart towards me was ever truly parental, and to whose memory I owe a tenderness and respect that will never leave me.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 10, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Your kind letter of precaution to Mr. Gregson sent him hither as soon as chapel-service was ended in the evening. But he found me already apprised of the event that occasioned it, by a line from Sephus, received a few hours before. My dear uncle's death awakened in me many reflections, which for a time sunk my spirits. A man like him would have been mourned

had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss, that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable, that for my own part I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness, that he still lived, was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now, that we have lost him only at a time when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to heaven. I know not, that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present anything to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others, that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was, doubtless, prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known, and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 15, 1788.

ALTHOUGH I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on

your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at because some with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be anything so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not

hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shalt not leave thy equal behind thee. W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, June 17, 1788.

MY DEAR WALTER,—You think me, no doubt, a tardy correspondent, and such I am, but not willingly. Many hindrances have intervened, and the most difficult to surmount have been those which the east and north-east winds have occasioned, breathing winter upon the roses of June, and inflaming my eyes, ten times more sensible of the inconvenience than they. The vegetables of England seem, like our animals, of a hardier and bolder nature than those of other countries. In France and Italy flowers blow, because it is warm, but here, in spite of the cold. The season however is somewhat mended at present, and my eyes with it. Finding myself this morning in perfect ease of body, I seize the welcome opportunity to do something at least towards the discharge of my arrears to you.

I am glad that you liked my song, and, if I liked the others myself so well as that I sent you, I would transcribe for you them also. But I sent *that*, because I accounted it the best. Slavery, and especially negro slavery, because the cruellest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But besides that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him

for other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror, on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence. But then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity.

Breakfast calls, and then Homer.—Ever yours,
W. C.

Erratum.—Instead of Mr. Wilberforce as author of *Manners of the Great*, read Hannah More

My paper mourns, and my seal. It is for the death of a venerable uncle, Ashley Cowper, at the age of eighty-seven.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, June 19, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—You must think me a tardy correspondent, unless you have had charity enough for me to suppose that I have met with other hindrances than those of indolence and inattention.

With these I cannot charge myself, for I am never idle by choice; and inattentive to you I certainly have not been; but, on the contrary, can safely affirm that every day I have thought on you. My silence has been occasioned by a malady to which I have all my life been subject—an inflammation of the eyes. The last sudden change of weather, from excessive heat to a wintry degree of cold, occasioned it, and at the same time gave me a pinch of the rheumatic kind; from both which disorders I have but just recovered. I do not suppose that our climate has been much altered since the days of our forefathers, the Picts; but certainly the human constitution in this country has been altered much. Inured as we are from our cradles to every vicissitude in a climate more various than any other, and in possession of all that modern refinement has been able to contrive for our security, we are yet as subject to blights as the tenderest blossoms of spring; and are so well admonished of every change in the atmosphere by our bodily feelings, as hardly to have any need of a weather-glass to mark them. For this we are, no doubt, indebted to the multitude of our accommodations; for it was not possible to retain the hardiness that originally belonged to our race, under the delicate management to which for many ages we have now been accustomed. I can hardly doubt that a bull-dog or a game-cock might be made just as susceptible of injuries from weather as myself, were he dieted and in all respects accommodated as I am. Or if the project did not succeed in the first instance (for we ourselves did not become what we are at once), in process of time, however, and in a course

of many generations it would certainly take effect. Let such a dog be fed in his infancy with pap, Naples biscuit, and boiled chicken; let him be wrapped in flannel at night, sleep on a good feather-bed, and ride out in a coach for an airing; and if his posterity do not become slight-limbed, puny, and valetudinarian, it will be a wonder. Thus our parents, and their parents, and the parents of both were managed; and thus ourselves; and the consequence is, that instead of being weather-proof, even without clothing, furs and flannels are not warm enough to defend us. It is observable, however, that though we have by these means lost much of our pristine vigour, our days are not the fewer. We live as long as those whom, on account of the sturdiness of their frame, the poets supposed to have been the progeny of oaks. Perhaps too they had little feeling, and for that reason also might be imagined to be so descended: for a very robust athletic habit seems inconsistent with much sensibility. But sensibility is the *sine quâ non* of real happiness. If, therefore, our lives have not been shortened, and if our feelings have been rendered more exquisite as our habit of body has become more delicate, on the whole, perhaps, we have no cause to complain, but are rather gainers by our degeneracy.

Do you consider what you do, when you ask one poet his opinion of another? Yet I think I can give you an honest answer to your question, and without the least wish to nibble. Thomson was admirable in description; but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonised. I could wish too, with Dr. Johnson,

that he had confined himself to this country; for when he describes what he never saw, one is forced to read him with some allowance for possible misrepresentation. He was, however, a true poet, and his lasting fame has proved it. Believe me, my dear madam, with my best respects to Mr. King, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—I am extremely sorry that you have been so much indisposed, and hope that your next will bring me a more favourable account of your health. I know not why, but I rather suspect that you do not allow yourself sufficient air and exercise. The physicians call them non-naturals, I suppose to deter their patients from the use of them.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, June 23, 1788.

WHEN I tell you that an unanswered letter troubles my conscience in some degree like a crime, you will think me endued with most heroic patience, who have so long submitted to that trouble on account of yours not answered yet. But the truth is, that I have been much engaged. Homer (you know) affords me constant employment; besides which I have rather what may be called, considering the privacy in which I have long lived, a numerous correspondence: to one of my friends in particular, a near and much-loved relation, I write weekly, and sometimes twice in the week; nor are these my only excuses; the sudden changes of the weather have much affected me, and especially with a disorder most unfavourable to letter-writing, an

inflammation in my eyes. With all these apologies I approach you once more, not altogether despairing of forgiveness.

It has pleased God to give us rain, without which this part of our country at least must soon have become a desert. The meadows have been parched to a January brown, and we have foddered our cattle for some time, as in the winter. The goodness and power of God are never (I believe) so universally acknowledged as at the end of a long drought. Man is naturally a self-sufficient animal, and in all concerns that seem to lie within the sphere of his own ability, thinks little or not at all of the need he always has of protection and furtherance from above. But he is sensible that the clouds will not assemble at his bidding, and that, though the clouds assemble, they will not fall in showers because he commands them. When therefore at last the blessing descends, you shall hear even in the streets the most irreligious and thoughtless with one voice exclaim—‘Thank God!’—confessing themselves indebted to His favour, and willing, at least so far as words go, to give Him the glory. I can hardly doubt therefore that the earth is sometimes parched, and the crops endangered, in order that the multitude may not want a memento to whom they owe them, nor absolutely forget the power on which all depend for all things.

Our solitary part of the year is over. Mrs. Unwin’s daughter and son-in-law have lately spent some time with us. We shall shortly receive from London our old friends the Newtons (he was once minister of Olney); and, when they leave us, we expect that Lady Hesketh will succeed them,

perhaps to spend the summer here, and possibly the winter also. The summer indeed is leaving us at a rapid rate, as do all the seasons, and though I have marked their flight so often, I know not which is the swiftest. Man is never so deluded as when he dreams of his own duration. The answer of the old patriarch to Pharaoh may be adopted by every man at the close of the longest life—'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage.' Whether we look back from fifty, or from twice fifty, the past appears equally a dream; and we can only be said truly to have lived, while we have been profitably employed. Alas, then! making the necessary deductions, how short is life! Were men in general to save themselves all the steps they take to no purpose, or to a bad one, what numbers, who are now active, would become sedentary!

Thus I have sermonised through my paper. Living where you live, you can bear with me the better. I always follow the leading of my unconstrained thoughts, when I write to a friend, be they grave or otherwise. Homer reminds me of you every day. I am now in the twenty-first *Iliad*.
Adieu, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 23, 1788.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Mr. Newton and Mrs. and their niece,¹ who, as you know, have long intended us a visit, will be here in about three weeks. I mention this as a necessary piece of information, and in the hope that at your own best time you also

¹ Miss Catlett.

will find an opportunity to repair to Weston. They will not stay more than ten days, or at most a fortnight. This at least, I imagine, may be taken for granted; ministers who attend to their charge seldom allowing themselves a longer absence. I learned this day (you may guess that I had it from the quarter abovementioned) the joyful news that you intend two trips hither. To this intelligence I owe the only glad moment that I have seen since I rose this morning. Ratify it yourself, and that one moment will multiply itself into many. We expect the Frogs at home again by the end of the week. I yesterday received from them a large box containing a very handsome present of an engraving to hang over the parlour chimney. The subject is Priam's interview with Achilles when he redeems the dead body of Hector. It is engraved after a picture of Hamilton by Cunego. I felt myself highly gratified on the receipt of it, and it will strike you, I dare say, as a well-judged and kind proof of their regard. They are on all occasions to the last degree friendly and obliging.

Being on the subject of presents I must mention a circumstance odd enough. Three baskets of fish have arrived within the last half year from some anonymous donor. They are directed to me by the description of Mr. Cowper at Weston, and both the writing and spelling are of the coarsest kind, in order I suppose to puzzle all conjecture. The first basket contained lobsters, which while we were eating it struck me that they must have been designed for our neighbour Cooper the tailor. We made ourselves merry for a time with the thought that we had eaten lobsters never designed

for us, but on inquiry found that the tailor had no claim upon us for depredation. The second basket contained mackerel remarkably large, and third a very fine turbot.

I send you Mrs. Montagu's copy, my dear, but with a grudging mind, sorely unwilling to do it so much at your expense, the more because in ten days time the world will be in possession of them.

The late rains have revived us. Till they came, the fields were withering for want of water, but now they laugh again.

Mr. Pitt has charmed me by the noble manner in which he has taken up the business of the slave-trade. Mr. Newton, who understands the subject well, tells me that the limitation of the number of slaves to the tonnage will of itself go near to abolish the traffic, for that it will hardly be worth while, on these terms, to send any ships to Africa at all.

I hope, my dear, thou wilt not make thy letters the less frequent because thou canst not frank them, or by waiting to get them franked. Ten times the money or cash would not do me half so much good as always it does to hear from thee.—I am, my Coz, most affectionately yours, WM. COWPER.

A very good Quaker, named Phillips, whom I never saw, but who wished me to write on the Slave Trade, which I declined doing, sends me by Mr. Newton one of Wedgwood's original cameos on that subject. I understand that they are not purchasable, which makes it all the more valuable. Wedgwood refused to sell them, affirming that it should never be said of him that he sold a negro.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 24, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I rejoice that my letter found you at all points so well prepared to answer it according to our wishes. I have written to Lady Hesketh, to apprise her of your intended journey hither, and she, having as yet made no assignation with us herself, will easily adjust her measures to the occasion.

I have not lately had an opportunity of seeing Mr. Bean. The late rains, which have revived the hopes of the farmers, have intercepted our communication. I hear, however, that he meets with not a little trouble in his progress towards a reformation of Olney manners; and that the Sabbath, which he wishes to have hallowed by a stricter and more general observation of it, is, through the brutality of the lowest order, a day of more turbulence and riot than any other. At the latter end of last week he found himself obliged to make another trip to the justice, in company with two or three of the principal inhabitants. What passed, I have not learned; but I understand their errand to have been, partly at least, to efface the evil impressions made on his worship's mind, by a rascal who had applied to him a day or two before for a warrant against the constable; which, however, he did not obtain. I rather fear that the constables are not altogether judicious in the exercise either of their justice, or their mercy. Some who have seemed proper objects of punishment, they have

released, on a hopeless promise of better behaviour ; and others, whose offence has been personal against themselves, though in other respects less guilty, they have set in the stocks. The ladies, however, and of course the ladies of Silver-End in particular, give them the most trouble, being always active on these occasions, as well as clamorous, and both with impunity. For the sex are privileged in the free use of their tongues, and of their nails, the Parliament having never yet laid them under any penal restrictions ; and they employ them accordingly. Johnson, the constable, lost much of his skin, and still more of his coat, in one of those Sunday battles ; and had not Ashburner hastened to his aid, had probably been completely stripped of both. With such a zeal are these fair ones animated, though, unfortunately for all parties, rather erroneously.

What you tell me of the effect that the limitation of numbers to tonnage is likely to have on the Slave Trade, gives me the greatest pleasure. Should it amount, in the issue, to an abolition of the traffic, I shall account it indeed an argument of great wisdom in our youthful minister. A silent, and indirect way of doing it, is, I suppose, the only safe one. At the same time, in how horrid a light does it place the trade itself ; when it comes to be proved by consequences, that the mere article of a little elbow-room for the poor creatures in their passage to the islands, could not be secured by an order of Parliament, without the utter annihilation of it ! If so it prove, no man deserving to be called a man, can say that it ought to subsist a moment longer.—My writing-time is expended, and breakfast is at hand. With our joint love to the trio, and our best

wishes for your good journey to Weston, I remain,
my dear friend, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—I beg you will present my best respects to Mr. Phillips, with many thanks for his obliging present, which I shall highly value.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 27, 1788.

FOR the sake of a longer visit, my dearest coz, I can be well content to wait. The country, this country at least, is pleasant at all times, and when winter is come, or near at hand, we shall have the better chance for being snug. I know your passion for retirement indeed, or for what we call *deedy* retirement, and the Frogs' intending to return to Bath with their mother, when her visit at the Hall is over, you will then find here exactly the retirement in question. I have made in the orchard the best winter-walk in all the parish, sheltered from the east, and from the north-east, and open to the sun, except at his rising, all the day. There we will have Homer and Don Quixote: and there we will have saunter and chat, and one laugh more before we die. Our orchard is alive with creatures of all kinds; poultry of every denomination swarms in it, and pigs, the drollest in the world!

I rejoice that we have a cousin Charles also, as well as a cousin Henry, who has had the address to win the good-likings of the Chancellor. May he fare the better for it! As to myself, I have long since ceased to have any expectations from that

quarter. Yet if he were indeed mortified as you say (and no doubt you have particular reasons for thinking so), and repented to that degree of his hasty exertions in favour of the present occupant, who can tell? he wants neither means nor management, but can easily at some future period redress the evil, if he chooses to do it. But in the meantime life steals away, and shortly neither he will be in circumstances to do me a kindness, nor I to receive one at his hands. Let him make haste, therefore, or he will die a promise in my debt, which he will never be able to perform. Your communications on the subject are as safe as you can wish them. We divulge nothing but what might appear in the magazine, nor that without great consideration.

I must tell you a feat of my dog Beau. Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange-coloured eye, very beautiful. I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river, while I was about forty yards distant from him; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my foot.

Mr. Rose, whom I have mentioned to you as a visitor of mine for the first time soon after you left us, writes me word that he has seen my ballads

against the slave-mongers, but not in print. Where he met with them, I know not. Mr Bull begged hard for leave to print them at Newport-Pagnell, and I refused, thinking that it would be wrong to anticipate the nobility, gentry, and others, at whose pressing instance I composed them, in their design to print them. But perhaps I need not have been so squeamish; for the opportunity to publish them in London seems now not only ripe, but rotten. I am well content. There is but one of them with which I am myself satisfied, though I have heard them all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition, that I can endure to read, when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to me to be all perfection.

Mrs. Unwin, who has been much the happier since the time of your return hither has been in some sort settled, begs me to make her kindest remembrance.—Yours, my dear, most truly,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, July, 5, 1788.

NOT *emetica tartar*, my coz, but the *soluble salt of tartar*, has been of such sovereign use to me, I have not ceased to take it since the time Dr. Ash¹ prescribed it, and believe myself indebted to it in a great degree for the measure of health that I have

¹ John Ash (1723-1798), physician. Founder of the Eumelian Club and of the General Hospital, Birmingham, where his portrait, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, hangs. He was a friend of Joseph Hill. Dr. Ash's family inherited Mr. Hill's Cowper mss. They are now in the possession of E. P. Ash, Esq. of Haileybury College.

enjoyed. But with all its virtues, it has not superseded the necessity of now and then (once or twice in a year perhaps) a dose of its namesake the emetic. My stomach is much improved, since the last operation, and yet is in all respects a troublesome and in one a very singular stomach. For you must know, my dear, to carry on the *Johnsonianism* a little farther, that take what I will of the emetic kind, I could not absolutely swear when the operation is over, that I have spuked at all. The only effect of it seems to be, that it disturbs certain air-bubbles contained in the *organ of digestion*, which, as they escape out of the said organ through the gullet or throat, bring with them a part of what I wish to be rid of. But your true roaring vomit, that pumps up the very dregs from the bottom, is an exploit to which I am by no means equal. Accordingly much is left where it was.

I have seen no more of Mrs. Piozzi's Letters than the *Magazine* and *Review* have afforded. If I remember right, the letters of Johnson pleased me chiefly on this account, that though on all other occasions he wrote like nobody, in his letters he expresses himself somewhat in the style of other folks. For I hate triplets in prose, and can hardly think even his good sense sufficient counterpoise for his affectation. I admire your new way to pay off old scores, and to save yourself from the Royal Durance, alias the King's Bench, by printing my letters. You have my free permission to do it, but not till I am dead. No, nor even then, till you have given them a complete revisal, erasing all that the critics in such matters would condemn. In which case, my dear, thou wilt reduce thy noble

to nine pence, and must take thy seat in a gaol at last.

I shall be as happy in the arrival of my Solander¹ as he whose name it bears was to arrive once more in England after his circumnavigation. To be the proprietor of any thing that was once my uncle's will make me rich. A mere trifle acquires value by having been the property of such a man; but his watch will be a vade mecum with which I shall hold a thousand conversations when I am in the woods alone; nor will his snuff-box fall a whit short of it, as a most desirable companion. The love I bore for him, and the honour I have for his memory, will make them both inestimable to me. The box, therefore, charged with these treasures will, both for its own sake and for the sake of its contents, be an addition not to my convenience only, but likewise to my real comfort;—not forgetting the Dean's toothpick. For the Dean² also was justly one of the principal boasts of our family, and a man whom I loved and honoured most devoutly. I have not words to tell you how much I feel myself obliged by the distinction made in my favour on this occasion, and I beg you will tell your sister so, giving her at the same time my sincerest thanks and acknowledgements. With respect to the conveyance of them hither, I think I shall be easier if they come by

¹ Daniel Charles Solander (1736-1782), famous naturalist. He accompanied Captain Cook in his first voyage, and subsequently received an appointment in the British Museum.

² Spencer Cowper (1713-1774), son of the Lord Chancellor, Dean of Durham from 1746. See *Truth*, line 119—

‘That grace was Cowper’s—his, confess’d by all,
Though plac’d in golden Durham’s second stall.’

See also Letter of 25th Sept. 1788.

the Wellingborough coach, having more confidence in it than in the waggon. The passage is quicker, the quantity of lumber less, and the chances of damage are fewer in proportion. It is also an established law, that the trusty Kitch meets always the coach at its arrival, and brings hither our two parcels immediately, whereas we wait sometimes two or three days, and sometimes longer, for a parcel sent by the waggon. Thanks, too, for the chocolate.

Beau's performance was exactly such as I represented it, without any embellishment. I may now add, that the next time we walked to the same place together, he repeated it. With respect to his diet, it is always of the most salutary kind: lights he never eats, and liver, having observed that it makes him sick, we never give him. Bread he eats in abundance, and it is the only thing for which he begs with much importunity. He is regularly combed, and his ears, which are remarkably handsome, are my own particular care. They gather burrs while he threads all the thickets in his way, from which I deliver them myself as soon as we get home. But having taught him to take the water, and even to delight in it, I never give him a forced washing, lest he should contract a hydrophobia, and refuse the river. I have observed, too, that dogs often washed get rheumatisms, because they do not dry themselves by exercise, but lie down in their damp coats, which is hurtful to every thing but a Highlander.

The Frogs are to come home this day by dinner. I want much to see what resolution the Chancellor moved against Mr. Rose. At least he will give him a trimming, and a good one, I doubt not.—
Ever yours,—my dear,

WM. COWPER.

P. S.—I forgot to tell you that my watch is no repeater, neither good for much in its kind. It was made at Cambridge for my brother, and brought home the day after his death—a metal one, for which I paid six guineas. It has been one of my chief employments to wish for a better.

TO JOSEPH HILL

July 6, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—‘Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear’ have compelled me to draw on you for the sum of twenty pounds, payable to John Higgins, Esq. or order. The draft bears date July 5th.—You will excuse my giving you this trouble, in consideration that I am a poet, and can consequently draw for money much easier than I can earn it.

I heard of you a few days since, from Walter Bagot, who called here and told me that you were gone, I think, into Rutlandshire, to settle the accounts of a large estate unliquidated many years. Intricacies, that would turn my brains, are play to you. But I give you joy of a long vacation at hand, when I suppose that even you will find it pleasant, if not to be idle, at least not to be hemmed around by business.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

Saturday, July 11, 1788.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Between Homer time and walking time I catch a few minutes to relieve you from all anxiety concerning the Solandrian

volume and its contents, precious to me, by informing you that neither the one nor the other sustained the least damage by the road. Once more I beg you to give my affectionate thanks to your sister, for all her kind remembrances on this occasion, not forgetting the books, which I shall with the utmost pleasure expect by the waggon.

This short scribblement I shall send by special messenger to Newport, for the failure of Rogers the great having put an end to all banking business at Olney, we have no longer the convenience of a daily post.

What is become of the General? It is so long since I heard from him, that I wonder and am concerned. I wrote to him yesterday.

I must not forget to tell you, that since I wrote last a cover, franked by Mr. Arnott, brought me a bank note for twenty-five pounds *from Anonymous*. Those two words being all that it contained beside.

Have you seen the *Gentleman's Magazine*? There am I, and there am I abused likewise. Somebody has sent my Mortuary Verses, who I know not. My censurer is neither a poet nor a good reasoner, therefore a fig for all such grumblings.

Mrs. Throg. has a nervous fever, but is not very bad. We are loving neighbours and always together. Mrs. Unwin's love and hearty good wishes that the pills may be as efficacious as ever.

'One ounce of castile soap scraped fine, beaten in a marble mortar, with as much honey as will bring it to a consistency for rolling into pills.

'Liquorice powder is very proper to dust the patts with while forming it into pills, of which some should be shaken over the pills also to keep them from sticking together.'

The Newtons come to-morrow ;—could not come to-day, his Grace of Bedford having engaged all the chaises in the town.

I have hung Grey over the chimney, and Solander lies on the study window-seat, spread with a green cloth, to save him from the chafe and friction otherwise incident to his situation. He is perfectly welcome,—Adieu, my dearest Coz.—Thine,

JEREMY JAGO.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, July 28, 1788.

It is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation ; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description ; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved ; I mean the lime walk. By the help of the axe and the wood-bill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it ; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while

to visit it, merely as an object of taste; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear! It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason.

Have you seen the account of Five hundred celebrated authors now living?¹ I am one of them; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanor of totally neglecting method; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least myself of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of my book of the *Task*, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connection which poetry demands; for in poetry (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics; the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the same time, to my honour be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them! Amen!

I join with you, my dearest coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes

¹ *Catalogue of Five Hundred Celebrated Authors of Great Britain, now living, etc.* London, 1788.

around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill shall lose thee? Ever thine, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, August 9, 1788.

THE Newtons are still here, and continue with us, I believe, until the fifteenth of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr. Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the *Iliad*. He brings me the compliments of several of the literati, with whom he is acquainted in town, and tells me, that from Dr. Maclaine,¹ whom he saw lately, he learns that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at the Hague, who are all enchanted with it, not forgetting the said Dr. Maclaine himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it. O rare we!

I have been employed this morning in composing a Latin motto for the King's clock; the embellishments of which are by Mr. Bacon. That gentle-

¹ Archibald Maclaine (1722-1804) was for some years a pastor of the English Church at The Hague, and was preceptor to the Prince of Orange. He resigned his position in 1796 and removed to England, settling at Bath, where he died. He published translations of Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History* and other books. He was a brother of James Maclaine, 'the gentleman highwayman.'

man breakfasted with us on Wednesday, having come thirty-seven miles out of his way on purpose to see your cousin. At his request I have done it, and have made two: he will choose that which liketh him best. Mr. Bacon is a most excellent man, and a most agreeable companion; I would that he lived not so remote, or that he had more opportunity of travelling.

There is not, so far as I know, a syllable of the rhyming correspondence between me and my poor brother left, save and except the six lines of it quoted in yours. I *had* the whole of it, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things, when I left the Temple.

Breakfast calls. Adieu!

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Aug. 18, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I left you with a sensible regret, alleviated only by the consideration that I shall see you again in October. I was under some concern also, lest, not being able to give you any certain directions myself, nor knowing where you might find a guide, you should wander and fatigue yourself, good walker as you are, before you could reach Northampton. Perhaps you heard me whistle just after our separation: it was to call back Beau, who was running after you with all speed, to entreat you to return with me. For my part, I took my own time to return, and did not reach home till after one; and then so weary, that I was glad of my great chair, to the comforts of which I added

a crust and a glass of rum and water, not without great occasion. Such a foot-traveller am I.

I am writing on Monday, but whether I shall finish my letter this morning depends on Mrs. Unwin's coming sooner or later down to breakfast. Something tells me that you set off to-day for Birmingham; and though it be a sort of Iricism to say here, I beseech you take care of yourself for the day threatens great heat,—I cannot help it; the weather may be cold enough at the time when that good advice shall reach you; but be it hot, or be it cold, to a man who travels as you travel, 'take care of yourself' can never be an unseasonable caution. I am sometimes distressed on this account; for though you are young, and well made for such exploits, those very circumstances are more likely than any thing to betray you into danger.

Consule quid valeant PLANTÆ, quid ferre recusent.

The Newtons left us on Friday. We frequently talked about you after your departure, and everything that was spoken was to your advantage. I know they will be glad to see you in London, and perhaps when your summer and autumn rambles are over, you will afford them that pleasure. The Throckmortons are equally well disposed to you, and them also I recommend to you as a valuable connection, the rather because you can only cultivate it at Weston.

I have not been idle since you went, having not only laboured as usual at the *Iliad*, but composed a *spick and span* new piece, called *The Dog and the Water Lily*, which you shall see when we meet

again. I believe I related to you the incident which is the subject of it. I have also read most of Lavater's¹ Aphorisms; they appear to me some of them wise, many of them whimsical, a few of them false, and not a few of them extravagant. *Nil illi medium.* If he finds in a man the feature or quality that he approves, he deifies him; if the contrary, he is a devil. His verdict is in neither case, I suppose, a just one. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Aug. 21, 1788.

MY DEAREST COZWOZ,—Our friends, as you opine, are gone, having made us, (to ourselves at least,) a very agreeable visit. We are now as quiet as dormice in a hollow tree, but not always so, neither shall we be so to-day, nor yet to-morrow. The Frogs dine us with us to-day, and to-morrow we with them. The Dowager² and George arrived yesterday. They have also at their house an aunt of Mrs. Frog's named Canning, together with her husband: so we are likely to be a numerous party. But be not alarmed, my dear, lest such a feast should produce a famine. There would, I confess, be danger of it, were we to entertain such multitudes often; but we and our neighbours have, without a word said on the subject, fallen on the only method that could certainly prevent it. We receive five or six invitations, and sometimes more, for one that we give;—a measure extremely salutary to the finances of a poet;—and poet as I am, I could not eat with any com-

¹ Johann Kaspar Lavater. See note, vol. ii. p. 324.

² Widow of Sir Robert Throckmorton.

fort at their table did I not occasionally set forth my board for them. Poor Mrs. Frog is far from well. In the morning she has tremblings and flutterings and other nervous affections as constantly as the morning comes; though as the day wears off, so do her indispositions with it, and she becomes herself again. I shall press her by and by to take the medicine of your recommendation. George's company in the mean time bids fair to be of use to her. They love each other dearly, and he is ever droll and cheerful.

The behaviour of my little dog on the occasion which I related to you has given birth to the following, which I transcribe in the hope it may entertain you at least as well as any thing that I could say in prose. It is spick and span, and unseen as yet by mortal eyes, except Mrs. Unwin's.

To me, my dear, it seemeth that we shall never by any management make a deep impression on Mrs. Montagu. Persons who have been so long accustomed to praise become proof against it. Mr. Walpole's opinion of me, as I forebode, will not flatter much your predilections in favour of your cousin. I know not why, but something tells me so.

My anonymous friend has again sent me fish;—three cod, with oysters. I should like them better if he would announce himself. I have made a new frock,—the Weston uniform. We are all to meet so habited this day.—Mr. Newton has lately procured me several subscriptions, and the General, I suppose, has told you that I am likely to get those of the Scots Universities. Farewell, my ever beloved coz.
—Thine most truly, W. M. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH AND LORD THURLOW

Aug. 26, 1788.

MY DEAREST COZ,—He who has thee for a friend will never want a warm one. I send thee *verbatim* and *literatim* what I have sent to the Chancellor. His letter is very kind, and has given me much pleasure. Give my love to the generous Sir Archer,¹ whom I honour highly for his bounty, and assure yourself that I love thee dearly and in every corner of my heart. Adieu. Thine, W. C.

MY LORD,—Your lordship will be very sure that though Lady Hesketh did not choose to apprise me of her intentions to write to you, she has not thought it necessary to observe the same secrecy with respect to your lordship's answer. The sight of your handwriting (myself the subject) has awakened in me feelings which with *you* I know will be my sufficient apology for following her example. They are such as would make it difficult for me to be silent, were there any propriety in being so. But I see none. Why should I seem indifferent where I ought to be warm, and am so; and what honour would it do me to appear to have forgotten a friend who still affectionately remembers me?

Had my cousin consulted me before she made application to your lordship in my favour, I should probably, at the same time that I had both loved and honoured her for her zeal to serve me, have discouraged that proceeding. Not because I have no need of a friend, or because I have not the highest

¹ Sir Archer Croft, of Croft Castle, who married Lady Hesketh's sister Elizabeth.

opinion of your constancy in that connection, but because I am sensible how difficult it must be even for *you* to assist a man in his fortunes who *can* do nothing but write verses, and who *must* live in the country. But should no other good effect ever follow her application than merely what has already followed it, an avowal on your lordship's part that you still remember me with affection, I shall be always glad that she acted as she did: she has procured me a gratification of which I shall always feel the comfort while I have any sensibility left.

I know that your lordship would never have expressed even remotely a wish to serve me, had you not in reality felt one, and will therefore never lay my scantiness of income to your account, but should I live and die circumscribed as I am, and have ever been, in my finances, will impute it always to its proper cause, my own singularity of character, and not in the least to any deficiency of good will in your lordship's dispositions toward me.

I will take this opportunity to thank you for having honoured my *Homer* with your subscription. In that work I labour daily, and now draw near to a close of the *Iliad*, after having been, except an intermission of eight months occasioned by illness, three years employed in it. It seemed to me, after all Pope's doings, that we still wanted an English *Homer*; and may I but be happy enough to supply the defect, and to merit your lordship's approbation, I shall envy no poet on the earth at present, nor many that have gone before me.

I have the honour to be, my lord, your lordship's most obliged and affectionate,
WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, Aug. 28, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Should you discard me from the number of your correspondents, you would treat me as I seem to deserve, though I do not actually deserve it. I have lately been engaged with company at our house, who resided with us five weeks, and have had much of the rheumatism into the bargain. Not in my fingers, you will say;—True. But you know as well as I, that pain, be it where it may, indisposes us to writing.

You express some degree of wonder that I found you out to be sedentary, at least much a stayer within doors, without any sufficient data for my direction. Now if I should guess your figure and stature with equal success, you will deem me not only a poet but a conjurer. Yet in fact I have no pretensions of that sort. I have only formed a picture of you in my own imagination, as we ever do of a person of whom we think much, though we have never seen that person. Your height I conceive to be about five feet five inches, which, though it would make a short man, is yet height enough for a woman. If you insist on an inch or two more, I have no objection. You are not very fat, but somewhat inclined to be fat, and unless you allow yourself a little more air and exercise, will incur some danger of exceeding in your dimensions before you die. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to you to walk a little more, at least in your garden, and to amuse yourself occasionally with pulling up here and there a weed, for it will be an inconvenience to you to be much fatter than you are, at

a time of life when your strength will be naturally on the decline. I have given you a fair complexion, a slight tinge of the rose in your cheeks, dark brown hair, and, if the fashion would give you leave to show it, an open and well-formed forehead. To all this I add a pair of eyes not quite black, but nearly approaching to that hue, and very animated. I have not absolutely determined on the shape of your nose, or the form of your mouth; but should you tell me that I have in other respects drawn a tolerable likeness, have no doubt but I can describe them too. I assure you that though I have a great desire to read him, I have never seen Lavater, nor have availed myself in the least of any of his rules on this occasion. Ah, madam! if with all that sensibility of yours, which exposes you to so much sorrow, and necessarily must expose you to it, in a world like this, I have had the good fortune to make you smile, I have then painted you, whether with a strong resemblance, or with none at all, to very good purpose.

I had intended to have sent you a little poem which I have lately finished, but have no room to transcribe it. You shall have it by another opportunity. Breakfast is on the table, and my time also fails, as well as my paper. I rejoice that a cousin¹

¹ This cousin of Mrs. King's was Thomas Martyn (1735-1825), a distinguished botanist who was elected in 1762 professor of botany at Cambridge, a post which he retained for sixty-three years. His first work, entitled *Plantæ Cantabrigienses*, appeared in 1763. Later he assisted at the publication of a book entitled *The Antiquities of Herculaneum*. In 1774 he became rector of Ludgershall, Buckinghamshire, and in 1776 vicar of Little Marlow. In 1784 he became preacher at the Charlotte Street Chapel, Pimlico. While in London he produced his translation of Rousseau's *Letters on the Elements of Botany* and his edition of Philip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary*. In 1790 he removed to

of yours found my volumes agreeable to him, for, being your cousin, I will be answerable for his good taste and judgment.

When I wrote last, I was in mourning for a dear and much-valued uncle, Ashley Cowper. He died at the age of eighty-six. My best respects attend Mr. King; and, I am, dear madam,—Most truly yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Sept. 2, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I rejoice that you and yours reached London safe, especially when I reflect that you performed the journey on a day so fatal, as I understand, to others travelling the same road. I found those comforts in your visit which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. When I say this, I say it trembling; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil; and whatever good thing may occur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learned by experience that I was born to be persecuted with

Pertenhall to the home of his cousin, the rector, the Rev. John King, the husband of Cowper's correspondent. In 1800 Mr. King resigned the living to Professor Martyn's only son, who in his turn gave it to his father in 1804. Martyn died at Pertenhall in 1825.

peculiar fury, and assuredly believing, that such as my lot has been, it will be so to the end. This belief is connected in my mind with an observation I have often made, and is perhaps founded, in great part, upon it : that there is a certain *style* of dispensations maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man, which, however the incidents of his life may vary, and though he may be thrown into many different situations, is never exchanged for another. The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change. When I have thought myself falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again ; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. The rough and the smooth of such a lot, taken together, should perhaps have taught me never to despair ; but through an unhappy propensity in my nature to forebode the worst, they have, on the contrary, operated as an admonition to me never to hope. A firm persuasion that I can never durably enjoy a comfortable state of mind, but must be depressed in proportion as I have been elevated, withers my joys in the bud, and, in a manner, entombs them before they are born : for I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock of all will be fatal.

We have been careful to execute your commission of compliments and respects to the Throckmortons. They speak of you both in the handsomest terms ; and I have little doubt that Mrs. Frog will visit Colman's Buildings the first opportunity.

Mr. Bean has still some trouble with his parish-

ioners. The suppression of five public-houses is the occasion. He called on me yesterday morning for advice ; though, discreet as he is himself, he has little need of such counsel as I can give him. Harold, who is subtle as a dozen foxes, met him on Sunday, exactly at his descent from the pulpit, and proposed to him a general meeting of the parish, in vestry, on the subject. Mr. Bean, attacked so suddenly, consented ; but afterward repented that he had done so, assured as he was that he should be out-voted. There seemed no remedy but to apprise them beforehand that he would meet them indeed, but not with a view to have the question decided by a majority ; that he would take that opportunity to make his allegations against each of the houses in question, which if they could refute, well ; if not, they could no longer reasonably oppose his measures. This was what he came to submit to my opinion. I could do no less than approve it ; and he left me with a purpose to declare his mind to them immediately.

My thanks attend Mrs. Newton for her Cambridge news. The worthy Doctor may fairly be said to be in a *sad scrape*.—I beg that you will give my affectionate respects to Mr. Bacon, and assure him of my sincere desire that he should think himself perfectly at liberty respecting the mottos, to choose one, or to reject both, as likes him best. I wish also to be remembered with much affection to Mrs. Cowper, and always rejoice to hear of her well-being.

Mrs. Unwin will speak for herself. She is going, she tells me, to write to Mrs. Newton. You will therefore present my best love to her and to Miss

Catty,¹ and believe me, as I truly am, my dear friend,—Most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE (DR. HUNTER'S, YORK)

Weston, Sept. 11, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It gave me much pleasure to learn that, your pedestrian ambition satisfied, you have at length betaken yourself to a carriage. I seem to have the better chance to receive you here in good health in October. I have not, myself, performed any great matters on foot since your departure. I have indeed twice visited the oak,² and with an intention to push my inquiries a mile beyond it, where, it seems, I should have found another oak, much larger, and much more respectable than the former; but once I was hindered by the rain, and once by the sultriness of the day. This latter oak has been known by the name of Judith many ages, and is said to have been an oak at the time of the Conquest. If I have not an opportunity to reach it before your arrival here, we will attempt that exploit together; and even if I should have been able to visit it ere you come, I shall yet be glad to do so; for the pleasure of extraordinary sights, like all other pleasures, is doubled by the participation of a friend.

You wish for a copy of my little dog's eulogium, which I will therefore transcribe; but by so doing, I shall leave myself but scanty room for prose.

Like a tradesman, I must say the needful, and in as few words as possible, that my muse may not

¹ Miss Catlett.

² See notes to next letter.

be too much crowded, or perhaps in part excluded. The snuffers or rather candle snappers are come, and are perfect in their kind. I admire an invention that has converted a disagreeable task into an amusement; such at least will be the effect for a time.

I shall be sorry if our neighbours at the Hall should have left it, when we have the pleasure of seeing you, yet fear that they will, for in October they go into Norfolk on a visit to Lord Petre, who has a seat there. I want you to see them soon again, that a little *consuetudo* may wear off restraint; and you may be able to improve the advantage you have already gained in that quarter. It is but lately and since I wrote last, that Mr. Frog, on hearing me mention you, said, I like Mr. Rose. I pitied you for the fears which deprived you of your uncle's company, and the more having suffered so much by those fears myself. Fight against that vicious fear, for such it is, as strenuously as you can. It is the worst enemy that can attack a man destined to the forum;—it ruined me, and will, I perceive, give you much trouble, unless you take great pains to conquer yourself in this particular. To associate as much as possible with the most respectable company, for good sense and good breeding, is, I believe, the only, at least I am sure it is the best, remedy. The society of men of pleasure will not cure it, but rather leaves us more exposed to its influence in company of better persons.

Now for the Dog and the Water Lily. No Fable.

The little gentleman above celebrated makes his affectionate compliments to you, and hopes for

your company again soon in his rambles round about Weston. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you also with that of, my dear sir,—Yours truly,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 13 (or 18) 1788.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Beau seems to have objections against my writing to you this morning that are not to be overruled. He will be in my lap, licking my face, and nibbling the end of my pen. Perhaps he means to say, I beg you will give my love to her, which I therefore send you accordingly. There cannot be, this hindrance excepted, a situation more favourable to the business I have in hand than mine at this moment. Here is no noise, *save* (as the poets always express it) that of the birds hopping on their perches and playing with their wires, while the sun glimmering through the elm opposite the window falls on my desk with all the softness of moonshine. There is not a cloud in the sky, nor a leaf that moves, so that over and above the enjoyment of the purest calm, I feel a well-warranted expectation that such as the day is, it will be to its end. This is the month in which such weather is to be expected, and which is therefore welcome to me beyond all others, October excepted, which promises to bring you hither. At your coming you will probably find us, and us only, or, to speak more properly, *uzz*. The Frogs, as I told you, hop into Norfolk soon, on a visit to Lord Petre, who, beside his palace in Essex, has another in that county. All the brothers are now at the Hall, *save* the physician, who is employed in

prescribing medicine to the Welsh at Cardiff. There lives he with *madame son épouse*, with an income of three hundred pounds a year,—all happiness and contentment. The mother is also here; and here is also our uncle Gifford,—a man whom if you know you must love, and if you do not, I wish you did. But he goes this morning, and I expect every minute to see him pass my window. In volubility, variety, and earnestness of expression, he very much resembles your father, and in the sweetness of his temper too; so that though he be but a passenger, or rather a bird of passage, for his head-quarters are in France, and he only flits occasionally to England, he has much engaged my affections. I walked with him yesterday on a visit to an oak¹ on the borders of Yardley Chase, an oak which I often visit, and which is one of the wonders that I show to all who come this way, and have never seen it. I tell them all that it is a thousand years old, verily believing it to be so, though I do not know it. A mile beyond this oak stands another, which has for time immemorial been known by the name of Judith,² and is said to have been an oak when my namesake the Conqueror first came hither. And beside all this, there is a good coach-way to them both, and I design that you shall see them too.

A day or two before the arrival of your last letter we were agreeably surprised by that of a hamper, stuffed with various articles in the grocery way, corresponding exactly with a bill of parcels which

¹ Now called Cowper's Oak. It was on this tree that he wrote the lines entitled 'Yardley Oak.'

² This tree is now called 'Gog.' A few yards from it is another huge oak, Magog. Gog is 32 feet in girth measured at five feet from the ground. Cowper also calls it 'The oak at Yardley Lodge.'

accompanied them. Though we had received no advice of the same, we were not at all at a loss for the sender, and hereby, my dear, make you our very best acknowledgements for your kind present. Having had company this summer, and being also obliged now and then to feed the Frogs, our stock of hams and tongues is not, at present, much: one of the former and two of the latter making up our whole store in that way.

I have as yet no news from the Chancellor. It is possible that none I may have till he can send me good; for to me it seems that after having expressed for me so much warmth of friendship still subsisting, he has laid himself under pretty strong obligations to do something for me, if any thing can be done. But though in my time my rest has been broken by many things, it never was yet by the desire of riches, or the dread of poverty. At the same time I have no objection to all that he can do for me, be it ever so much.

I am going this morning with the Dowager Frog to Chicheley, on a visit to the Chesters, which obliges me to shorten my scribble somewhat. Unless I finish my letter first you will not get it by this post. Therefore farewell, my dear: may God keep thee, and give us a joyful meeting;—so pray we both. Amen.—Ever thine,

WM. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON

Weston Underwood, Septbr. 20, 1788.

DEAR SIR,—My thanks to you for the pleasure I have found in the perusal of *Adriano*¹ come to you

accompanied by some strictures on the work, of which you will make some use or none, just as you shall see good. They will at least serve to convince you, that I have fulfilled your request with a degree of attention that may prove the pleasure I had in doing it. I certainly have not objected to all that is objectionable; the passages which I have censured are rather specimens of a greater number that call equally loud for alteration. Neither is the style, which in many places creeps too much, the only circumstance that I could wish amended. The writer has ability to remove all such blemishes with very little trouble to himself, if he will give but a short time to the business. The principal exception seems to be against a particular passage in the story, on which passage nevertheless all that follows so immediately depends, that I have not been able to suggest anything in the shape of a remedy.—Gilbert is supposed to have been cast away and buried by Frederic in the sands. Yet on the very evening of the day that brings forth this shocking catastrophe the party, at first inconsolable for his loss, have so effectually overcome their grief, that Adriano amuses himself in his garden, and the young ladies take a walk and a book; she in particular who had been destined to Gilbert, the shipwrecked lover, and who afterward marries him, finding a commodious bench under a willow, actually falls fast asleep.—Oh, what pity it will be if what is unnatural in this part of the story cannot be rectified! For surely the just reflections and the fine poetry to which it gives birth deserve to be immortal. I beseech you to recommend it to the author to exert himself on an occasion in which his honour is so much concerned,

and suffer him not idly to forego a degree of reputation which few men have the happiness to acquire. I am either much mistaken, and have read him through a false medium, or he has few, perhaps no equals in the present day. But except on favourite occasions, he does not put forth half his strength.

As I have not specified all his faults, so neither have I half his beauties; but what I have said will be sufficient to express to you my opinion of his work, which is what you desired.—I am, Dear Sir,
Yours, *Wm. Cowper* W. M. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Sept. 25, 1788.

Say what is the thing by my riddle design'd
What you carried to London, and yet left behind?

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I expect your answer, and without a fee. The half hour next before breakfast I devote to you. The moment Mrs. Unwin arrives in the study, be what I have written much or little, I shall make my bow, and take leave. If you live to be a judge, as if I augur right you will, I shall expect to hear of a walking circuit.

I was shocked at what you tell me of——. Superior talents, it seems, give no security for propriety of conduct; on the contrary, having a natural tendency to nourish pride, they often betray the possessor into such mistakes as men more moderately gifted never commit. Ability, therefore, is not wisdom, and an ounce of grace is a better guard

against gross absurdity than the brightest talents in the world.

I rejoice that you are prepared for transcript work: here will be plenty for you. The day on which you shall receive this, I beg you will remember to drink one glass at least to the success of the *Iliad*, which I finished the day before yesterday, and yesterday began the *Odyssey*. It will be some time before I shall perceive myself travelling in another road; the objects around me are at present so much the same; Olympus and a council of gods meet me at my first entrance. To tell you the truth, I am weary of heroes and deities, and, with reverence be it spoken, shall be glad, for variety's sake, to exchange their company for that of a Cyclops.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Sept. 25, 1788

MY DEAREST MADAM,—How surprised was I this moment to meet a servant at the gate, who told me that he came from you! He could not have been more welcome, unless he had announced yourself. I am charmed with your kindness and with all your elegant presents. So is Mrs. Unwin, who begs me in particular to thank you warmly for the housewife, the very thing she had just begun to want. In the fire-screen you have sent me an enigma, which at present I have not the ingenuity to expound; but some Muse will help me, or I shall meet with somebody able to instruct me. In all that I have seen besides (for that I have not yet seen,) I admire both the taste and the execution. A tooth-pick case I had;

but one so large, that no modern waistcoat pocket could possibly contain it : it was some years since the Dean of Durham's, for whose sake I valued it, though to me useless. Yours is come opportunely to supply the deficiency, and shall be my constant companion to its last thread. The cakes and the apples we will eat, remembering who sent them ; and when I say this, I will add also, that when we have neither apples nor cakes to eat, we will still remember you. What the ms. poem can be, that you suppose to have been written by me, I am not able to guess ; and since you will not allow that I have guessed your person well, am become shy of exercising conjecture on any meaner subject. Perhaps they may be some mortuary verses, which I wrote last year at the request of a certain parish clerk. If not, and you have never seen them, I will send you them hereafter.

You have been at Bedford. Bedford is but twelve miles from Weston. When you are at home, we are but eighteen miles asunder. Is it possible that such a paltry interval can separate us always ? I will never believe it. Our house is going to be filled by a cousin of mine and her train, who will, I hope, spend the winter with us. I cannot, therefore, repeat my invitation at present, but expect me to be very troublesome on that theme next summer. I could almost scold you for not making Weston in your way home from Bedford. Though I am neither a relation,¹ nor quite eighty-six years of age, believe me I should as much rejoice to see you and Mr. King as if I were both.

¹ Referring to Mrs. Battison of Bedford, with whom Mrs. King had been staying.

(Mrs. Unwin has this moment opened the screen, which I admire, and shall find particularly useful.)

I sent you, my dear madam, the poem I promised you, and shall be glad to send you anything and everything I write as fast as it flows. Behold my two volumes ! which, though your old acquaintance, I thought might receive an additional recommendation in the shape of a present from myself.

What I have written I know not, for all has been scribbled in haste. I will not tempt your servant's honesty, who seems by his countenance to have a great deal, being equally watchful to preserve uncorrupted the honesty of my own.

I am, my dearest madam, with a thousand thanks for this stroke of friendship, which I feel at my heart, and with Mrs. Unwin's very best respects, most sincerely yours,

W. C.

P.S.—My two hares died little more than two years since ; one of them aged ten years, the other eleven years and eleven months.

Our compliments attend Mr. King.

TO MRS. KING

Weston-Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when

I amused myself in a way somewhat similar to yours; allowing, I mean, for the difference between masculine and female operations. The scissors and the needle are your chief implements; mine were the chisel and the saw. In those days you might have been in some danger of too plentiful a return for your favours. Tables, such as they were, and joint-stools such as never were, might have travelled to Pertenhall in most inconvenient abundance. But I have long since discontinued this practice, and many others which I found it necessary to adopt, that I might escape the worst of all evils, both in itself and in its consequences—an idle life. Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which nature never designed me; though among them were some in which I arrived at considerable proficiency, by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a 'squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself; and in the article of cabbagenets, I had no superior. I even had the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice; for I actually produced three landscapes,¹ which a lady² thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to

¹ An engraving from one appears in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1804.

² Lady Austen.

exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers: from them I proceeded to cucumbers; next to melons. I then purchased an orange-tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, cost me much ingenuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important consequences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a greenhouse, and accordingly built one; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do. When I left Olney for Weston, I could no longer have a greenhouse of my own; but in a neighbour's garden I find a better, of which the sole management is consigned to me.

I had need take care, when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set off be of some importance; for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have generally filled my paper. But self is a subject inexhaustible, which is the reason that

though I have said little, and nothing, I am afraid, worth your hearing, I have only room to add, that I am, my dear Madam,—Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin bids me present her best compliments, and say how much she shall be obliged to you for the receipt to make that most excellent cake which came hither in its native pan. There is no production of yours that will not be always most welcome at Weston.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Oct. 30, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The good fortune that you wished me I have actually enjoyed, having had an opportunity by means of Lady Hesketh's carriage to see your brother Howard at Chicheley. I had the pleasure of spending near an hour with him in the study, for the consequences of his unfortunate fall which he got in Norfolk did not permit him to join the ladies in the saloon. It gave me much concern that not having seen him so many years, I should at last find him with a broken bone. He was, however, otherwise in good health, and as I told him, had suffered less in his looks by the lapse of time that has passed since we were all at school together than any of us.

I was truly happy to be the instrument of bringing the Chesters and my cousin to an acquaintance. She and your sister would love each other more than people generally do in this neighbourhood, could they come often together. Another year

perhaps may afford more frequent opportunities than they are likely to find in the present, which is now far spent, and threatens us with foul weather soon and dirty roads, which make Chicheley unapproachable by mortal wight who is subject to fear in a carriage. Menelaus tells Telemachus that had Ulysses returned safe from Troy it was in his intention to have built him a city and a house in Argos, that he and his people, transferring themselves thither from Ithaca, might have become his neighbour. Had I the thousands with which some people are favoured I would gladly build for the Chesters, not a city, which they would not want, but a house at least as good as that which Menelaus had designed for Ulysses, in the precincts of Weston-Underwood, their non-residence here being the only defect in the situation.—But I ought to account myself in my present circumstances here, if not so happy as in that case I should be, at least as happy as a world which I do not hold, as the saying is, in a string, is ever likely to make me. We are but one remove from brother and sister, and that distance has long since been absorbed by a more than sisterly affection.

The Northampton clerk has been with me again, and I have again promised him my assistance. You may depend on my sending you a printed copy of this my second meditation upon churchyard subjects, as soon as I have received the impression. It is likely indeed to be an annual remittance; for said clerk will I dare say resort to me for poetical aid till either he or I shall want an epitaph for ourselves. I am not sorry to be employed by him, considering the task, in respect of the occasion of it,

as even more important than *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together. To put others in mind of their latter end is at least as proper an occupation for a man whose own latter end is nearer by almost sixty years than once it was, as to write about gods and heroes. Let me once get well out of these two long stories, and if I ever meddle with such matters more, call me, as Fluellen says, a fool and an ass and a prating coxcomb.

It gives me much pleasure to hear that Lord Bagot is so well, and I sincerely wish that he may find the Naiads of Buxton as propitious to him as those of Cheltenham. The Peerage can ill spare such peers as he.

With Mrs. Unwin's best respects, I remain, my dear friend, most truly yours, WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston-Underwood, 11 Nov. 1788.

WESTON has not been without its tragedies since you left us; Mrs. Throckmorton's piping bullfinch has been eaten by a rat, and the villain left nothing but poor Bully's beak behind him. It will be a wonder if this event does not at some convenient time employ my versifying passion. Did ever fair lady, from the Lesbia of Catullus to the present day, lose her bird and find no poet to commemorate the loss?

But another tragedy, still more deplorable by me though it did not happen, had almost happen'd the very day I believe on which you left us.¹

W. C.

¹ A mishap that occurred to Beau.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 29, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Not to fill my paper with apologies, I will only say, that you know my occupation, and how little time it leaves me for other employments, in which, had I leisure for them, I could take much pleasure. Letter-writing would be one of the most agreeable, and especially writing to you. It happens too that at this season of the year I lie in bed later than when the days are not so short; not for the sake of indulgence, but through necessity; for, the servants lying later too, there is no room for me below till near nine o'clock. Thus is my time, that part of it which I give to my correspondents, sadly abridged, so that I am at this moment in debt to them all, except one who lives in Ireland. I have occasionally however heard of your well-being; you would otherwise, notwithstanding all these hinderances, have received at least a line or two, could I have sent no more. I know too that you have heard of mine; or if not of my *well*-being, at least of my being *as well* as when you saw me.

About three days since, I was told that Mr. Wright, Lord Dartmouth's steward, was at Olney, and yesterday I passed through Olney, entering the town at one end and going out at the other, without once recollecting that such a person exists. This morning he is gone to London. My fault is therefore irreparable, unless you should at any time happen to see Mr. Wright, and will be so good as to ask his pardon for me. He is one of the last men living to whom I would show dis-

respect, because he is truly respectable himself, and the servant of a most valuable master; the case, too, seems the more flagrant, because I must have passed immediately before the window of the room in which he sat, whether he was at the Swan or at Mr. Gardener's, where he dined yesterday, and I passed at two o'clock. It gives me much pleasure, however, to understand by a message from Mr. Wright, delivered here by Mr. Raban, that his lordship enjoys better health than for years past. May he long enjoy it!

Poor Jenny Raban¹ is declining fast toward the grave, and as fast aspiring to the skies. I expected to have heard yesterday of her death; but learned, on inquiry, that she was better. Dr. Kerr has seen her, and by virtue, I suppose, of his prescriptions, her fits, with which she was frequently troubled, are become less frequent. But there is no reason, I believe, to look for her recovery. Her case is a consumption, into which I saw her sliding swiftly in the spring. There is not much to be lamented, or that ought to be so, in the death of those that go to glory. She was a beautiful girl, and perhaps may have left a heart-ache for a legacy to some poor swain of Olney; though I never heard, beautiful as she was, that she had any *lovers*. Many an ugly bundle can find a husband in such a place as Olney, while Venus herself would shine there unnoticed.

If you find many blots, and my writing illegible,

¹ 'Poor Jenny Raban outlived Cowper. After many years of mental derangement she died in her brother George's house at Olney, about the end of February 1827. Her tomb, an obelisk, is near the west entrance of Olney Church. Her father, the Rev. T. Raban, "carpenter-parson," is buried in the same spot.'

you must pardon them in consideration of the cause. Lady Hesketh and Mrs. Unwin are both talking as if they designed to make themselves amends for the silence they are enjoined while I sit translating Homer. Mrs. Unwin is preparing the breakfast, and not having seen each other since they parted to go to bed, they have consequently a deal to communicate.

I saw Mr. Bean lately, and he is well. I called there yesterday but found him out. He also dined at Mr. Gardener's. It gave me concern to be told by the servant that Mrs. Bean is very much indisposed with the rheumatism. I have seen Mr. Greatheed both at his own house and here, but his wife I have not seen, neither have I heard in what state of health and spirits she finds herself at present. Not long since she suffered a melancholy that seemed rather alarming. Prosperity sits well on Mr. Greatheed, and I cannot find that this advantageous change in his condition has made any alterations either in his views or his behaviour.

When we returned thanks for an excellent basket of fish, shrimps were not mentioned, because the shrimps were not found till after the letter was sent, and then by mere accident. They were brought to light, however, soon enough to serve the purpose for which you were so kind as to send them.

The winter is gliding merrily away while my cousin is with us. She annihilates the difference between cold and heat, gloomy skies and cloudless. Mrs. Unwin is well, and joins me in the most affectionate remembrances of the trio in Coleman's

Buildings.¹ I have written I know not what, and with the despatch of legerdemain; but with the utmost truth and consciousness of what I say, assure you, my dear friend, that I am, ever yours,
W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Nov. 30, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter, dated the 15th past, accompanying the books with which you have favoured me, and for which I return you a thousand thanks, did not arrive till yesterday. Johnson withheld it in hopes of being able to send me my MSS. well Fuselied, but after all his hopes proved frustrate. I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne; the neatest of all men in his versification, though when I was under his ushership at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person. He was so inattentive to his boys, and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of the Westminster line; a plot which, I believe, he executed very successfully; for I have not heard of any who has at all deserved to be compared with him.

We have had hardly any rain or snow since you left us; the roads are accordingly as dry as in the middle of summer, and the opportunity of

¹ Rev. John Newton, Mrs. Newton, and Miss Catlett, their adopted daughter.

walking much more favourable. We have no season in my mind so pleasant as such a winter: and I account it particularly fortunate that such it proves, my cousin being with us. She is in good health, and cheerful, so are we all; and this I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be said of all your friends at Weston. We shall rejoice to see you here at Christmas; but I recollected when I hinted such an excursion by word of mouth, you gave me no great encouragement to expect you. Minds alter, and yours may be of the number of those that do so; and if it should, you will be entirely welcome to us all. Were there no other reason for your coming than merely the pleasure it will afford to us, that reason alone would be sufficient; but after so many toils, and with so many more in prospect, it seems essential to your well-being that you should allow yourself a respite, which perhaps you can take as comfortably (I am sure as quietly) here as anywhere. We mourn daily for the king, and three times in the week execrate the malignity and viperism of the *Morning Herald*.

The ladies beg to be remembered to you with all possible esteem and regard; they are just come down to breakfast, and being at this moment extremely talkative, oblige me to put an end to my letter. Adieu.

W. C.

At the foot of this letter is a short note in the autograph of Lady Hesketh.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Weston-Underwood, Dec. 2, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I told you lately that I had an ambition to introduce to your acquaintance my valuable friend, Mr. Rose. He is now before you. You will find him a person of genteel manners and agreeable conversation. As to his other virtues and good qualities, which are many, and such as are not often found in men of his years, I consign them over to your own discernment, perfectly sure that none of them will escape you. I give you joy of each other, and remain, my dear old friend, most truly yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston-Underwood, Dec. 6, 1788.

MY DEAR MADAM,—It must, if you please, be a point agreed between us, that we will not make punctuality in writing the test of our regard for each other, lest we should incur the danger of pronouncing and suffering by an unjust sentence, and this mutually. I have told you, I believe, that the half hour before breakfast is my only letter-writing opportunity. In summer I rise rather early, and consequently at that season can find more time for scribbling than at present. If I enter my study now before nine, I find all at sixes and sevens; for servants will take, in part at least, the liberty claimed by their masters. That you may not suppose us all sluggards alike, it is necessary, however, that I should add a word

or two on this subject, in justification of Mrs. Unwin, who, because the days are too short for the important concerns of knitting stockings and mending them, rises generally by candle light; a practice so much in the style of all the ladies of antiquity who were good for anything that it is impossible not to applaud it.

Mrs. Battison being dead, I began to fear that you would have no more calls to Bedford; but the marriage, so near at hand, of the young lady you mention with a gentleman of that place, gives me hope again that you may occasionally approach us as heretofore, and that on some of those occasions you will perhaps find your way to Weston. The deaths of some and the marriages of others make a new world of it every thirty years. Within that space of time, the majority are displaced, and a new generation has succeeded. Here and there one is permitted to stay a little longer, that there may not be wanting a few grave dons like myself, to make the observation. This thought struck me very forcibly the other day, on reading a paper, called the *County Chronicle*, which came hither in the package of some books from London. It contained news from Hertfordshire, and informed me, among other things, that at Great Berkhamstead, the place of my birth, there is hardly a family left of all those with whom, in my earlier days, I was so familiar. The houses, no doubt, remain, but the inhabitants are only to be found now by their grave stones; and it is certain that I might pass through a town, in which I was once a sort of principal figure, unknowing and unknown. They are happy who

have not taken up their rest in a world fluctuating as the sea, and passing away with the rapidity of a river. I wish from my heart that yourself and Mr. King may long continue, as you have already long continued, exceptions from the general truth of this remark. You doubtless married early, and the thirty-six years elapsed may have yet other years to succeed them. I do not forget that your relation Mrs. Battison lived to the age of eighty-six. I am glad of her longevity, because it seems to afford some assurance of yours; and I hope to know you better yet before you die.

Should you again dream of an interview with me, I hope you will have the precaution to shut all doors and windows, that no such impertinents as those you mention may intrude a second time. It is hard that people who never meet awake, cannot come together even in sleep without disturbance. We might, I think, be ourselves untroubled, at a time when we are so incapable of giving trouble to others, even had we the inclination.

I have never seen the *Observer*, but am pleased with being handsomely spoken of by an old school-fellow. Cumberland and I boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever: but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources, at present, of all my intelligence. Addison speaks of persons who grow dumb in the study of eloquence, and I have actu-

ally studied Homer till I am become a mere ignoramus in every other province of literature.

An almost general cessation of egg-laying among the hens has made it impossible for Mrs. Unwin to enterprise a cake. She, however, returns you a thousand thanks for the receipt; and being now furnished with the necessary ingredients, will begin directly. My letter-writing time is spent, and I must now to Homer. With my best respects to Mr. King, I remain, dear Madam, most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

When I wrote last, I told you, I believe, that Lady Hesketh was with us. She is with us now, making a cheerful winter for us at Weston. The acquisition of a new friend, and at a late day, the recovery of the friend of our youth, are two of the chief comforts of which this life is susceptible.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 9, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—That I may return you the Latin manuscript as soon as possible, I take a short opportunity to scratch a few hasty lines, that it may not arrive alone. I have made here and there an alteration, which appeared to me for the better; but, on the whole, I cannot but wonder at your adroitness in a business to which you have been probably at no time much accustomed, and which, for many years, you have not at all practised. If, when you shall have written the whole, you shall wish for a corrector of the rest, so far as my own skill in the matter goes, it is entirely at your service.

Lady Hesketh is obliged to you for the part of

your letter in which she is mentioned, and returns her compliments. She loves all my friends, and consequently cannot be indifferent to you. The Throckmortons are gone into Norfolk, on a visit to Lord Petre. They will probably return this day fortnight. Mr. F—— is now preacher at Ravenstone. Mr. Canniford still preaches here. The latter is warmly attended. The former has heard him, having, I suppose, a curiosity to know by what charm he held his popularity; but whether he has heard him to his own edification, or not, is more than I can say. Probably he wonders, for I have heard that he is a sensible man. His successful competitor is wise in nothing but his knowledge of the gospel.

I am summoned to breakfast, and am, my dear friend, with our best love to Mrs. Newton, Miss Catlett, and yourself.—Most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

I have not the assurance to call this an answer to your letter, in which were many things deserving much notice: but it is the best that, in the present moment, I am able to send you.

Our naval rumours in general deserve but little credit, and it seems now that even a father is not to be implicitly believed in what he relates of his own daughter. Mr. Raban called on purpose to tell us that Jenny was dying, but Dr. Kerr being consulted, instead of confirming, has entirely falsified the report. He says that she is not only not in a dying state, but has never been in the least danger. I carried your letter to Mrs. Raban myself, who informed me that the poor girl is better,

though extremely weak through the operation of medicines prescribed to her by the doctor.

TO ROBERT SMITH

Weston-Underwood, Dec. 20, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,—Mrs. Unwin is in tolerable health, and adds her warmest thanks to mine for your favour, and for your obliging inquiries. My own health is better than it has been many years. Long time I had a stomach that would digest nothing, and now nothing disagrees with it; an amendment for which I am, under God, indebted to the daily use of soluble tartar, which I have never omitted these two years. I am still, as you may suppose, occupied in my long labour. The *Iliad* has nearly received its last polish. And I have advanced in a rough copy as far as to the ninth book of the *Odyssey*. My friends are some of them in haste to see the work printed, and my answer to them is—‘I do nothing else, and this I do day and night;—it must in time be finished.’

My thoughts, however, are not engaged to Homer only. I cannot be so much a poet as not to feel greatly for the King, the Queen, and the country.¹ My speculations on these subjects are indeed melancholy, for no such tragedy has befallen in my day. We are forbidden to trust in man; I will not therefore say I trust in Mr. Pitt;—but in his counsels, under the blessing of Providence, the remedy is, I believe, to be found,

¹ George III.'s illness was first made known on October 12, 1788. He went to St. Paul's to make thanksgiving for his recovery on April 23, 1789.

if a remedy there be. His integrity, firmness, and sagacity, are the only human means that seem adequate to the great emergence.

You say nothing of your own health, of which I should have been happy to have heard favourably. May you long enjoy the best. Neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself have a sincerer or a warmer wish, than for your felicity.—I am, my dear Sir, your most obliged and affectionate,

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

19 Jan. 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—We are all truly sorry that you were accompanied to London so disagreeably. Having the headache you had small need of fellow-travellers, and perhaps found yourself, though colder, yet more commodiously situated, than had you been obliged to exert yourself for the entertainment of others. If we had our pleasures while you were with us, as certainly we had, we have had our pains since. Poor Mrs. Unwin got a terrible fall on a gravel-walk covered with ice, the consequences of which have confined her to her chamber ever since. At first we feared a fracture, her pain being so extreme that she fainted under it, and continued in a fainting fit a considerable time; but it proves only a contusion. Her leg has been useless, however, a whole week, and whole weeks, I doubt not, must yet pass before it will recover its former ability. Evils never come alone. We lose my cousin to-morrow, unless the frost, which seems to have set in again this morning, should influence her to stay till the

roads are again beaten. Yesterday they were full of water, consequently to-day they are full of ice, and though I shall think highly of her wisdom at any rate, yet my opinion of it will be advanced to a still sublimer height if she consent to a little delay. Mrs. Unwin's fall and my cousin's departure are a burthen, together, quite as heavy as I feel myself a match for, but I have been so many years accustomed either to feel trouble or to expect it, that habit has endued me with that sort of fortitude which I remember my old schoolmaster Dr. Nicol used to call the passive valour of an ass. I have accordingly tolerable spirits in circumstances which twenty years ago would have left me none.

I thank you much for all the trouble you have taken on my account, for your call on Johnson, and for what you have done toward fitting out my parcel for its journey. It came not on Saturday, and I conclude that the candle-snappers not being included in time, occasioned the delay.

Johnson, no doubt, with the true sagacity of a bookseller smelt out your relationship to Mr. Griffiths, and on that account, felt no small degree of alarm on discovering that you were made privy to the important secret. I am glad, however, that you had the address to compose his spirits. If he be at all an adept in the science professed by his friend Fuseli's friend Lavater, your aspect might serve in part to assure him that his fears were needless.

I do not at present feel myself so much amused by my new occupation as I hoped to be. The critic's task is not a pleasant one, unless he can

find something to commend; and it has not yet been my fortune to stumble on an opportunity of much encomium. There are already three authors in my cupboard; ay, four, who will have small cause to bless their stars that it has been my lot to judge them. On Saturday I read the first book of the *Athenaid*,¹ and it is a sad thing, but a true, that I must read it again before I shall understand it. This bodes not much felicity to the memory of poor Glover, but I will hope that the gloom which hangs over his outset will clear away as I proceed. Apollo and all Parnassus know, or ought to know, that I enter on his work with the best dispositions in the world to be charmed with it.

The ladies both beg to be affectionately remembered to you. My scribbling time and paper are both spent.—Adieu! Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

We exult, and Lady Hesketh, in particular, in the persevering orthodoxy of your political sentiments. It is impossible that a man like you can do less than abhor daily more and more the conduct of a faction which makes itself duly more and more detestable. It is the natural antipathy of good to ill.

TO SAMUEL ROSE²

PERCY STREET, RATHBONE PLACE

MY DEAR SIR,—I send you a line or two by the hands of a Bearer whom I am sorry so to employ,

¹ By Richard Glover (1712-1785), also the author of *Hosier's Ghost* included in Percy's *Reliques*. Cowper, in order to oblige Johnson, was reviewing *The Athenaid* for *The Analytical Review*.

² The original is in the Cowper Museum at Olney.

just to tell you that your deliverance from your cough gives us the greatest pleasure, and to thank you for a barrel of remarkable fine oysters, by which I was redeemed from the necessity of sucking eggs five nights successively, and to tell you that I will write to you soon, when I will send you the Northampton Verses.

It is ten at night, and the cloth not yet laid. You have guessed perhaps by this time that my cousin is the Bearer alluded to above. She leaves us, to our great regret, to-morrow. Adieu, and good night.—Yours, with the ladies' compliments,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE.

The Lodge, Jan. 24, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—We have heard from my cousin in Norfolk Street; she reached home safely, and in good time. An observation suggests itself, which, though I have but little time for observation making, I must allow myself time to mention. Accidents, as we call them, generally occur when there seems least reason to expect them; if a friend of ours travels far in different roads, and at an unfavourable season, we are reasonably alarmed for the safety of one in whom we are so much interested; yet how seldom do we hear a tragical account of such a journey! It is, on the contrary, at home, in our yard or garden, perhaps in our parlour, that disaster finds us; in any place, in short, where we seem perfectly out of the reach of danger. The lesson inculcated by such a procedure on the part of Providence to-

wards us seems to be that of perpetual dependence. —Having preached this sermon, I must hasten to a close. You know that I am not idle, nor can I afford to be so; I would gladly spend more time with you, but by some means or other this day has hitherto proved a day of hinderance and confusion. W.C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, Jan. 29, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—This morning I said to Mrs. Unwin, 'I must write to Mrs. King. Her long silence alarms me—something has happened.' These words of mine proved only a prelude to the arrival of your messenger with his most welcome charge, for which I return you my sincerest thanks. You have sent me the very things I wanted, and which I should have continued to want, had not you sent them. As often as the wine is set on the table, I have said to myself, This is all very well; but I have no bottle-stands: and myself as often replied, No matter; you can make shift without them. Thus I and myself have conferred together many a day; and you, as if you had been privy to the conference, have kindly supplied the deficiency, and put an end to the debate for ever.

When your messenger arrived I was beginning to dress for dinner, being engaged to dine with my neighbour Mr. Throckmorton, from whose house I am just returned, and snatch a few moments before supper to tell you how much I am obliged to you. You will not, therefore, find me very prolix at present; but it shall not be long before you shall hear further from me. Your honest old neighbour

sleeps under our roof, and will be gone in the morning before I shall have seen him.

I have more items than one by which to remember the late frost: it has cost me the bitterest uneasiness. Mrs. Unwin got a fall on a gravel-walk covered with ice, which has confined her to an upper chamber ever since. She neither broke nor dislocated any bones; but received such a contusion below the hip, as crippled her completely. She now begins to recover, after having been helpless as a child for a whole fortnight; but so slowly at present, that her amendment is even now almost imperceptible.

Engaged, however, as I am with my own private anxieties, I yet find leisure to interest myself not a little in the distresses of the Royal Family, especially in those of the Queen. The Lord Chancellor called the other morning on Lord Stafford: entering the room, he threw his hat into a sofa at the fireside, and clasping his hands, said, 'I have heard of distress, and I have read of it; but I never saw distress equal to that of the Queen.' This I know from particular and certain authority.

My dear Madam, I have not time to enlarge at present on this subject, or to touch any other. Once more, therefore, thanking you for your kindness, of which I am truly sensible; and thanking, too, Mr. King for the favour he has done me in subscribing to my Homer, and at the same time begging you to make my best compliments to him; I conclude myself, with Mrs. Unwin's acknowledgements of your most acceptable present to her,—Your obliged and affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Jan. 29, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I shall be a better, at least a more frequent correspondent, when I have done with Homer. I am not forgetful of any letters that I owe, and least of all forgetful of my debts in that way to you; on the contrary, I live in a continual state of self-reproach for not writing more punctually; but the old Grecian, whom I charge myself never to neglect, lest I should never finish him, has at present a voice that seems to drown all other demands, and many to which I could listen with more pleasure than even to his *os rotundum*. I am now in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, conversing with the dead. Invoke the Muse in my behalf, that I may roll the stone of Sisyphus with some success. To do it as Homer has done it is, I suppose, in our verse and language, impossible; but I will hope not to labour altogether to as little purpose as Sisyphus himself did.

Though I meddle little with politics, and can find but little leisure to do so, the present state of things unavoidably engages a share of my attention. But as they say, Archimedes, when Syracuse was taken, was found busied in the solution of a problem, so, come what may, I shall be found translating Homer.—Sincerely yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge. Jan. 31, 1789.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I have dined thrice at the Hall since we lost you, and this morning accom-

panied Mrs. Frog in her chaise to Chicheley.¹ What vagary I shall perform next is at present uncertain, but such violent doings must have proportionable consequences. Mrs. Unwin certainly recovers, but not fast enough to satisfy me. She now moves from chamber to chamber without help of wheels, but not without help of a staff on one side, and a human prop on the other. In another week I hope she will be able to descend the staircase, but it will probably be long ere she will move unsupported. Yesterday an old man came hither on foot from Kimbolton; he brought a basket addressed to me from my yet unseen friend Mrs. King; it contained two pair of bottle-stands her own manufacture; a knitting bag, and a piece of plum-cake. The time seems approaching when that good lady and we are to be better acquainted; and all these *douceurs* announce it.

I have lately had a letter to write daily, and sometimes more than one: this is one reason why I have not sooner answered your last. You will not forget that you allowed me a latitude in that respect, and I begin already to give you proof how much I am persuaded of the sincerity with which you did it. In truth, I am the busiest man that ever lived sequestered as I do, and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity.

Mr. Chester, who if not a professed virtuoso, is yet a person of some skill in articles of virtù, produced for our amusement a small drawer furnished with seals and impressions of seals,—antiques. When he had displayed and we had admired all his

¹ Chicheley Hall, five miles from Olney; seat of the Chesters.

treasures of this kind, I took the ring from my finger, which you gave me, and offered it to his inspection, telling him by whom it was purchased, where, and at what price. He examined it with much attention, and begged me to let him take an impression from it. He did so, and expressed still more admiration. I put it again on my finger, and in a quarter of an hour he begged to take another. Having taken another, he returned it to me, saying, that he had shown me an impression of a seal accounted the best in England (if I mistake not, it was a Hercules, an antique in possession of the Duke of Northumberland), but that he thought mine a better, and much undersold at thirty guineas. He took the impression with much address, and I never myself viewed it before to so great advantage.

It would be an easy matter to kill me, by putting me into a chaise and commanding me to talk as I go. It is astonishing how exhausted I feel myself after rumbling and chattering incessantly for three hours.

Mrs. Frog, of Bath, is better, and George continues at the Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Gifford are expected there next Tuesday. Bully is in perfect health, and if I can secure him from such a fate, shall never be cat's-meat. Take care of thyself for my sake, that I may see thee yet again in due season. It is very kind in Mr. Rose to distinguish so honourably a poor poet like me, and it shall be my endeavour to merit by my future good behaviour as a bard the favour which he shows me now. Your kind expression on the same subject I will never forget; but I had a

thousand times rather be as poor as all poets are, than you should ungown yourself to prevent it.

I sent my verses to the *World* at the wrong time. That paper is certainly veering, and has been veering for some weeks past: it was not likely, therefore, that the printer of it should do any thing less than suppress a squib sent hissing at the *Morning Herald*, the principal trumpet of the party he had just adopted. Farewell, my dearest coz.—With Mrs. Unwin's affectionate respects, I am ever thine, WM. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston Lodge, Feb. 4, 1789.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—A letter of mine is no sooner sealed and sent than I begin to be dissatisfied with, and to hate it. I have accordingly hated the two letters that I have sent to *you* since your departure, on many accounts, but principally because they have neither of them expressed any proportion of what I have felt. I have mourned for the loss of you, and they have not said so. Deal with them as you desire me, for another reason, to deal with yours,—burn them, for they deserve it.

The room over the study is still the place of our habitation, though Mrs. Unwin is certainly on the recovery. This day we have both been more sensible of an amendment in the part affected, than on any day since she received the hurt. Yet even now the chief subject of our boast is merely this, not that she walks, but that she limps with less labour. But we are, I hope, arrived at that stage of the affair, when one day will do more toward

her restoration than three days did at the beginning.

I thank you for all your politics and anecdotes of political persons, and you may depend on it that all the treason and treasonable matter with which you shall entrust me, shall be committed to the flames; I confide in you for the same prudent disposal of all my wicked and malicious communications. Perhaps a time is at hand when it may not be altogether so safe to give our free sentiments of public persons, even in a private letter, as it has been these many years to express them with the utmost licentiousness in print. A vicious government is always a jealous and a vindictive one. But in the worst of times we may arch our eyebrows and shrug our shoulders; and that shall be our comfort when all other comforts fail.

This day's post brought me a letter from the *Bouton de Rose*.¹ Having told me that he had called on you last Sunday evening, in his way from Chiswick, and spent three most agreeable hours with you and your sister, he proceeds thus: — 'Indeed, my dear Sir, Lady Hesketh flattered and gratified me much by the polite and kind attentions with which she honoured me. Since my father's death I have not been exposed to the temptation of much notice, therefore my feelings are not altogether blunted by the frequency of the occurrence, and I must feel sensibly obliged when virtue, understanding, and rank condescended to assure me of their regard. I do myself an honour when I declare I love Lady Hesketh,—but it is an honour I cannot forgo, and I sincerely believe

¹ Mr. Samuel Rose, Cowper's friend.

there are few persons to whom her Ladyship has been known, who have not experienced a similarity of feelings with myself.'

I rejoice that my young friend has so just an estimation of what deserves his affections, and love him the better for it.

The *Athenaid* sleeps while I write this. I have made tables of contents for twelve books of it, and have yet eight to analyse. I must then give somewhat like a critical account of the whole, as critical at least as the brevity it will be necessary to observe, will allow. A poem consisting of twenty books could not perhaps hope for many readers who would go fairly through it, and this has possibly missed a part of the praise it might have received, had the story been comprised within more reasonable limits. I am the more persuaded this is the case, having found in it many pages to admire. It is condemned I dare say by those who have never read the half of it; at the same time I do not mean to say that it is, on the whole, a first-rate poem, but certainly it does not deserve to be cast aside as lumber, the treatment which I am told it has generally met with.

This morning I had a visit from Mr. Greatheed. He has been lately in London, and took the opportunity to get miniatures of himself and his wife. His wife's he showed me: it seemed to me admirably well done, and I asked by whom. He said by Englefeldt,—if I heard and remember the name aright. He then, fixing his eyes on me, said I wish I had yours! Mine, I replied, is nowhere extant. He replied and said,—That's a pity; I expect Englefeldt soon to call on me.—Would you

give me leave to bring him over to Weston that he may take your likeness? I should be happy to have it.—I answered, I could not possibly refuse a request that did me so much honour. I shall not therefore at last die without leaving something behind me in my own likeness. If Fuseli should happen to come on the same errand, I shall be multiplied with a witness. I felt myself, however, pleased with Mr. Greatheed's request, not because I am fool enough to think a phiz like mine worthy to be perpetuated, but because it seemed to bespeak him more warmly affected toward me than I suspected.

Is it possible that the first volume of Sir John Hawkins's *Johnson* can have been put into any of your trunks or boxes by mistake? for I can only find the second. I looked for it soon after you went, but forgot till now to mention it.

With Mrs. Unwin's best compliments, I remain,
my beloved coz.—Most truly thine,

WM. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 15, 1789.

HORACE censures the Phæacian youth for having spent too much of their time in taking care of their skins, and I am in danger myself of meriting to fall under the same censure. My correspondents at least have cause to deplore the day when you first recommended to me the flesh-brush, in the use of which I now spend most of the time which formerly I could give to them. The practice is, I suppose, salutary, as most things are that are troublesome; and yet be it as salutary as its most sanguine

advocate can allege, it is certainly either not infallible, or must be long pursued in order to be made effectual, for yesterday the lumbago seized me exactly in the moment when I was currying the very part which the lumbago always seizes. But I am not discouraged, on the contrary, I scrub with redoubled ardour, and have this morning received much benefit in said part by the operation.

We are delighted with your accounts of the King, and with the symptoms that now show themselves of his speedy recovery. May a few more weeks confirm our hopes, and place him on his throne again, to the everlasting mortification of the dogs who now grin and go about the city, grudging that they are not satisfied.

The tenth of this month was what we call here, a High-Buck-Holiday. On that day Mrs. Unwin descended, for the first time since her fall, into the study. We have twice taken walks into the orchard, limpingly indeed, with much labour, and some pain; but much, I believe, to her benefit. For this reason I regret these perpetual storms, which will not suffer a more frequent repetition of that remedy; but notwithstanding so much necessary confinement, she recovers strength and the use of her leg daily, and though thinner than before, looks as well as ever. She bids me give you many thanks, on her part, for all your inquiries and kind mention of her.

Among the few events which occur at Weston, it seems one of the most worthy to be here recorded, that about a week since, I had an evening visit from Mr. Canniford. His business was to solicit my subscription to a publication of ancient

Inscriptions, but I had the barbarity to refuse it. He pleased me when he went. I ought to add, that the work is not his, nor by any friend of his, for which cause I found it the less difficult to be close-fisted.

My neighbour George¹ is proceeding with the transcript of my Homer, having taken it up where you left it. This reviewing business I find too much an interruption in my main concern, and when I return the books to Johnson, shall desire him to send me either authors less impatient, or no more till I have finished Homer. Mr. Frog goes to town on Tuesday, on which day I dine at the Hall, for the consolation of his wife in his absence. He returns on Thursday. Bully is in perfect health, and sings all day. I have planted all the laurels you wished I should, viz., two dozen more.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, ever truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

My love to the Hillikins.

P. S.—The miniature of Mrs. Greatheed appeared to me to be exceedingly well executed, with great freedom and elegance, and by what I have heard of her, must be as favourable a copy of her physiognomy as you can wish should be made of mine. Her husband will suffer no engraving to be made from it without my sovereign permission. Of that you may rest assured.

This subject reminds me of the cameo of Sir Thomas, which you have so kindly destined to

¹ Mr. George Throckmorton.

a place in my study. Can it not accompany the pamphlet you mentioned, and which we long to see? You cannot regret your late tranquil mornings and evenings here more than we regret that you do not still enjoy them. But—*le bons tems viendra*. I have owed Mr. Rose a letter so long, that the thought of it haunts me continually. I must pay him soon, if it be only for peace of conscience.

Once more, my dear coz, farewell.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, PERCY STEET, RATHBONE PLACE,
LONDON

The Lodge, Feb. 19, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—If I were not the most industrious man alive, and if I were not sure that you know me to be so, I should think a long apology necessary for so long a silence; but I will spare myself and you that trouble, assured that in consideration of my various employments you will excuse me.

It gave me much pleasure to hear of Mrs. Rose's complete recovery. May she long be continued to you. The loss of a good mother is irreparable; no friend can supply her place.

You mention your visit at Lady Hesketh's with much pleasure, and I can assure you (for I have it under her own hand) that you were not the only person much pleased on that occasion. Continue what you are, and I will ensure you a welcome among all persons of her description.

I have taken, since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you.

I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or a stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you, if I did not know that you have no occasion for it.

But though I do not often find my fireside assistant to my memory on other subjects, there is one on which it serves me faithfully at the present moment. We are indebted, not only to your uncle's kindness for the coals by which we warm ourselves, but to his purse also. If that account be not already liquidated, you may settle it when you please with my cousin, who will be responsible for the amount, and left me a commission to tell you so.

I am reading Sir John Hawkins,¹ and still hold the same opinion of his book, as when you were here. There are in it, undoubtedly, some awkwardnesses of phrase, and, which is worse, here and there some unequivocal indications of a vanity not easily pardonable in a man of his years; but on the whole I find it amusing, and to me at least, to whom every thing that has passed in the literary world within these five-and-twenty years is news, sufficiently replete with information. Mr.

¹ Sir John Hawkins (1719-1789) wrote works on music, and produced in 1787 a *Life of Dr. Johnson*.

Throckmorton told me about three days since, that it was lately recommended to him by a sensible man, as a book that would give him more insight into the history of modern literature, and of modern men of letters than most others. A commendation which I really think it merits. Fifty years hence, perhaps, the world will feel itself obliged to him.

I say nothing about Politics, persuaded that it becomes me more, situated as I am, to be a hearer on that subject than a speaker. But this I may and will say, that I rejoice in the fairer prospect that now seems to open on us, of the King's recovery.

Mrs. Unwin's restoration is slow, but I hope sure. She cannot walk at all without a support, nor long, with any; yet she walks better than she did a week ago. She must certainly have received some greater hurt than we were aware of, but what hurt we shall never know. It is sufficient that He knows who is able to heal the worst. With her best comps.,—I remain, my dear friend, truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 1789.

You dislike the crossing of letters, and so do I; yet though I write at the hazard of that inconvenience, I feel that I must write this evening. My hands are at present less full than usual. Having lately sent Johnson as much Review work as will serve to satisfy him for a time, I allow myself a little vacation from those labours, which, however, I must soon resume.

The King's recovery is with us a subject of daily conversation and of continual joy. It is so providentially timed that no man who believes a Providence at all can say less of it than that *This is the finger of God!* Never was a hungry faction so mortally disappointed, nor the integrity of an upright administration more openly rewarded. It is a wonderful era in the history of this country, and posterity will envy us the happiness of having lived at such a period. We who are loyal subjects and love our monarch, may now take up the old Jacobite ditty, and say *The King shall enjoy his own again*,—an application which I fear we should never have had an opportunity to make had his recovery been delayed but a little longer. The faction at home have driven too fast, and the Irish will find that they have made a blunder. Now let us listen to the raptures that will be pretended on this occasion. Sheridan, I expect, will soar in rhetorical ecstasies: Burke will say his prayers are answered; and Fox will term it the happiest event that he has ever witnessed; and while they thus speak, they will gnash their teeth, and curse inwardly. Oh! they are a blessed junto!—may opposition to ministry be their business while they live.

You must not yet, my dear, felicitate me on the double recovery of the King and Mrs. Unwin too. I rather think it probable that the King will be able to rule us, before she will be able to walk. She boasts, indeed, that she is as active as old Farmer Archer,¹ but she would find few hardy enough to bet on her head, were a trial to take place between them. My hopes are chiefly in the

¹ A Weston neighbour.

approach of a gentler season, for the progress of her amendment now is almost imperceptible.

About a fortnight since I received six bottles of rum from Henry, who might, according to what the General told me, have sent seven had he pleased,—no law forbidding it. I have written twice to the General, and have had no answer;—Is he ill? or can you tell me what it is that occasions his silence?

When you were here we told you a long story about my brother's mare, and the money due for her keeping. Almost two years ago, when Mr. Heslop¹ wrote to me on that subject expressing a desire to have the account settled, I referred him to Mr. Hill as to my agent in all money-matters, who, I told him, would settle it with him and discharge the balance. Nothing, however, ensued on this reference, and he never called on Mr. Hill for the purpose. The day before yesterday I received a letter from him, sent hither from Adstock² by a messenger, who came a-foot, requiring again a liquidation of the account, and threatening me with legal coercion if I delayed to settle it any longer. This being rather a strange procedure, and somewhat ungentlemanlike, made me very angry, and the next day, that is yesterday, I wrote to him signifying as much, reminding him of my letter of reference, and referring him to Mr. Hill again. What course he will deign to take now is in his own bosom, but he is an unreasonable man, if, being at this moment in Town, he will rather choose to trouble me with farther demands than to go to Great Queen Street, to have them satisfied.

Mr. Newton writes me word that Martin Madan,

¹ Rev. Luke Heslop, Archdeacon of Bucks.

² Near Winslow, Bucks.

on his way to London, where he intended to have spent a day or two with his sister, whom he had not seen these four years, was seized with an asthma and obliged to return to Epsom. His illness continued a fortnight, and he was judged to be in great danger: he, however, recovered. By the report of his physicians he is not likely to last long.

I dined yesterday at the Hall, where, notwithstanding the difference of our political sentiments, we were perfectly at peace with each other. Religion and politics both excluded, we are sometimes threatened with a dearth of topics, but in general make a tolerable shift without them. They are always kind and friendly.

Mrs. Unwin's best compliments attend you.—I am, my dear, most truly yours WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston Lodge, March 5, 1789.

MY DEAREST COZ,—Since I send you much verse, I shall send you the less prose. Desirous to forward the enclosed to you as early as possible, I violate my engagements to Homer for once, and give the morning to the King, the Queen, and you. On the word of a poet, I can assure you that I have done my best, sensible that when verses are presented to a royal personage, they ought not to be slovenly put together, nor such as one might produce between sleeping and waking. I have bestowed praise, which, on these occasions, is a thing of course, but have endeavoured to dress it so as to give it some air of novelty; and the best

of the matter is, that though it be praise, it is truth, and I could swear to it. Had the King and the Queen been such as the world has been pestered with ever since such folks were heard of, they should have had no verse from me, unless you had insisted; but being such as they are, it seemed necessary that I, who am now poet by profession, should not leave an event in which their happiness and that of the nation are so much concerned uncelebrated.

Many thanks, my dear, for the parcel, which was truly welcome, especially on account of the cameo, in which, however, unless Sir Thomas altered much after I saw him last, I cannot trace much resemblance of him. In the nose, forehead, and eyes, some likeness; in cheek, chin, and mouth, none at all; which I wonder at the more because I have seen the strongest resemblances taken in that manner. But I am happy to have it, though but a remote copy of one whom we both knew and loved. I have read the pamphlet, and admire both the matter and manner of it; but how the deuce a country gentleman should be so accurately and intimately informed as the writer certainly is, has excited some wonder both in Mrs. Unwin and in me. Had he rather chosen to write in the character of a gentleman, resident in town, to his friend in the country, I should have found it a more natural procedure. His minute knowledge of the characters and views of both parties would then have been easily accounted for, whereas now it is rather mysterious. But this is no great matter,—a *faux-pas*, if it be one, that does not at all affect the sequel. Permit me to add to all

this, that Molly Pears and Hannah,¹ together with their duty to your ladyship, send their love and thanks to Mrs. Eaton for her kind remembrance of them.

Mr. Bean called here last night, when I had the pleasure of conversing with him on the subject of the royal recovery. His heart is warm on that theme, and we had a hearty laugh at the Opposition and their blundering friends, the Irish. When the knowing ones are so completely taken in, it is no wonder if poor Teague is entrapped also. I shall not forget to thank you, too, for your papers, which are really useful as an antidote to the baneful *Herald*.

Adieu, my dear; I can say no more just now, but that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's affectionate compliments, who is still a stick-propped walker, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Weston, March 6, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—To travel so far and come back in no better health hardly pays you for the trouble of the journey. A southern trip would be more likely to benefit you than a northern. He whose pores have been stopped during a whole

¹ Hannah Willson, Cowper's, or rather Mrs. Unwin's, *protégée*. See Letters of 22nd July 1781, 24th Dec. 1784, and 14th April 1789. Hannah's mother, 'Patty Willson,' was the natural daughter of Mr. Cawthorne (Mrs. Unwin's father); hence the interest that Mrs. Unwin took in the girl. Hannah was very pretty, and at first attractive in her behaviour, but Mrs. Unwin's partiality and a boarding-school education thoroughly spoilt her, and she became a great trouble to the Weston household.

English winter, need not go to Scotland to have them shut still faster. But spring is at hand, and we hope that all your present complaints will give way to the influences of a warmer atmosphere.

Mrs. Unwin had a terrible fall, which by its consequences confined her above stairs a whole month, and she is still so lame as to be able to walk only on smooth ground, and with a stick, and for not more than a quarter of an hour at a time.

As for me, I am as well as usual. We shall rejoice to see you when it shall suit you to come over. Our affectionate compliments to Mrs. Bull and your son. I have not time to add more, but that I am,—Yours,

W. COWPER.

TO MRS. KING

March 12, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I feel myself in no small degree unworthy of the kind solicitude which you express concerning me and my welfare, after a silence so much longer than I gave you reason to expect. I should indeed account myself inexcusable, had I not to allege in my defence perpetual engagements of such a kind as would by no means be dispensed with. Had Homer alone been in question, Homer should have made room for you: but I have had other work in hand, at the same time, equally pressing, and more laborious. Let it suffice to say, that I have not wilfully neglected you for a moment, and that you have never been out of my thoughts a day

together. But I begin to perceive, that if a man will be an author, he must live neither to himself nor to his friends so much as to others, whom he never saw nor shall see.

My promise to follow my last letter with another speedily, which promise I kept so ill, is not the only one which I am conscious of having made to you, and but very indifferently performed. I promised you all the smaller pieces that I should produce, as fast as occasion called them forth, and leisure occurred to write them. Now, the fact is, that I have produced several since I made that fair profession, of which I have sent you hardly any. The reason is, that, transcribed into the body of a letter, they would leave me no room for prose; and that other conveyance than by the post I cannot find, even after inquiry made among all my neighbours for a traveller to Kimbolton. Well, we shall see you, I hope, in the summer, and then I will show you all. I will transcribe one for you every morning before breakfast as long as they last; and when you come down you shall find it laid on your napkin. I sent one last week to London, which by some kind body or another, I know not whom, is to be presented to the Queen. The subject, as you may guess, is the King's recovery,—a theme that might make a bad poet a good one, and a good one excel himself. This, too, you shall see when we meet, unless it should bounce upon you before from some periodical register of all such matters.

I shall commission my cousin, who lately left us, to procure for me the book you mention. Being, and having long been, so deep in the

business of translation, it was natural that I should have my thoughts on that subject. I have accordingly had as many as would of themselves, perhaps, make a volume, and shall be glad to compare them with those of any writer recommended by Mr. Martyn. When you write next to that gentleman, I beg you, madam, to present my compliments to him, with thanks both for the mention of Mr. Twining's book,¹ and for the honour of his name among my subscribers.

Mrs. Unwin, though two months ago she fell, is still lame. The severity of the season, which has not suffered her to exercise herself in the open air, has, no doubt, retarded her recovery; but she recovers, though even more slowly than she walks. She joins me in best respects to yourself and Mr. King, and in hearty desires to see you both at Weston. Forgive the past. I make no more promises, except to remain always, my dear madam,—Your affectionate, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, April 6, 1789.

MY DEAREST COZ,—You received, I suppose, about a fortnight since, a letter from me, containing divers matters of which you have hitherto said nothing. In that letter I asked you what we should do with our Verses on the King's Recovery; for that they should be printed by some means or other seems expedient. For my

¹ Thomas Twining (1735-1804), translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The book was sent to the poet by General Cowper. Twining was also a musician and linguist. See Letters of April 22 and April 29.

own part, I know not very well what course to take. I am not ambitious of figuring very often in the *Magazine*, for reasons which perhaps my vanity may suggest to me, and which your zeal for my success may possibly suggest to you. It seems rather a publication in which candidates should wish to appear, than they who have acquired some little rank already. But the decision of this important point, as then, so I still refer absolutely to you.

When you next see Mr. Rose, tell him that I love him, though I do not write to him. It is to be hoped that none of my correspondents will measure my regard for them by the frequency, or rather *seldomcy*, of my epistles. It is very little that I can do, occupied as I am, toward satisfying their just demands upon me, and I am at this moment in debt to every creature to whom I ever write at all. Mr. Rose informed me in his last, that in conversation with the Archbishop of York, he had mentioned to him my translation of Homer. It was news to his Grace; he had never heard of it before. Consequently he has not yet subscribed. But is there no way of getting at him? for his rank and literary reputation are such, that would he give me his name, I had rather admit him to a place in my list for nothing than go without it. He was tutor to your late friend and mine at Oxford.

We have had our rejoicings also at Weston. Last Saturday fortnight Mr. Frog illuminated the front of his house in the handsomest manner, threw up many rockets, gave a large bonfire and beer to the people. I was there, and, as my

friends tell me, caught a violent cold on the occasion, though I was not sensible of it myself. Certain it is, however, that whether in consequence of that vagary or not, I have since been miserably tormented with a distemper called a canker. It seized my tongue, and affected me frequently both in the day and in the night with sensations which I could hardly bear, and not at all describe. I now just begin to eat again as other people do, and shall dine at the Hall to-morrow.

My dear, April is come, and May cannot be very far off. In May, you know, we are to see you here. Remember this. I know you will come if it be possible, because you assured me that nothing but impossibility should prevent you. Need I add that we shall both be happy to receive you? Certainly I need not, did not the custom established in all such cases require it. For it is true, and doubtless you already know it, that we are never so comfortable as when you are with us. Mrs. Unwin heartily subscribes to this, and sends you her best remembrances. She is still lame, but in a way of a-mend-ment—that is to say, mends very slowly.—Believe me, as I truly am, thine,

WM. COWPER.¹

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, April 14, 1789.

I THREATENED you with this, my cousin, by the hands of Mr. Menzies, and it would have

¹ This letter is much mutilated. I gather from Sotheby's Catalogue (1858) that the omitted parts are: 'On the best mode of publishing the *Hibernia*,' 'The poet's opinion on the characters of the Royal Princes,' etc.

reached you sooner had he been the bearer; but Mr. Bull gave me yesterday a morning call, and offered to be my Mercury on the occasion, promising at the same time to deliver any packet with which I should entrust him into your own hands. He wanted, he said, an errand by way of introduction, and could not on any other terms find courage enough to call on you. To alleviate therefore his terrors, and to procure you a visit from a man whom I know you will be glad to see, I have substituted him in the place of the first intended.

Your letters in which you postpone your visit to an uncertain period, though I felt the force of your reason, sunk my spirits for a time. Woodcocks, I said, should come in the winter, and go in the spring; but the order of nature is reversed that I may be disappointed. But I depend on you with an absolute reliance, that you will return as soon as you can, and with this persuasion shall endeavour in the mean time to compose my spirits.

Place it entirely to the account of my forgetfulness that the receipt of your *favour*, (such in a double sense), was not sooner acknowledged. It happened that the very evening on which it arrived, Hannah¹ was by invitation gone to the Hall to a dance, given on occasion of the King's recovery. Mrs. Unwin immediately sent it after her, and it was pinned before her then and there. She was not a little proud of being the only lady in the company so distinguished, and is sorry that you have not been sooner thanked for

¹ Hannah Willson.

it. She is truly a good girl, and in no part of her behaviour blameable. Her chief occupation at present in the day-time is to make black lace for a cloak, which she does, by the account of the judicious in those matters, exceedingly well. In the evening she works at her needle. Ever since the first week or ten days of Mrs. Unwin's lameness she has slept on the floor in a corner of her closet, that she might be at hand to assist her as often as she wanted help; and though sometimes called from her pallet twice or thrice in a night, has risen always with an affectionate readiness that no artifice can imitate.

You very reasonably supposed, my dear, that I was not unacquainted with the figure I had made in the *Morning Herald*: yet true it is that the first notice I had of it was from yourself. Whether the Frogs never sent me that paper, or whether I overlooked them (for I generally skim it hastily over), the information was entirely news to me. I am inclined with you to suppose that that they sent them. I sent to the *General Evening* an account of their illumination; and to return the compliment, they doubtless sent my verses to the *Herald*. I fully purposed to have fished it out yesterday when I dined there, but for want of a fair opportunity at first, afterwards forgot it.

Mr. Frog goes to town on Thursday, and his wife follows him on the Monday after. She told me with a significant sort of a look that she was going on purpose to be present at the ball at Brooks's. I answered: It is indifferent to me on what account you go, if you do but take care of yourself while you are gone, and return in good

health to Weston. Thus, and by such management as this, I contrive to avoid all party disputation,—a moderate course, which I think myself the more at liberty to pursue, because my political principles are upon record, having long since been printed.

I have considered, and had indeed, before I received your last, considered of the practicability of a new publication, and the result of my thoughts on that topic is, that with my present small stock of small pieces, the matter is not feasible. I have but few, and the greater part of those few have already appeared in the *Magazine*;—a circumstance which of itself would render a collection of them just at this time improper. It is, however, an increasing fund, and a month perhaps seldom passes in which I do not add something to it. In time their number will make them more important, and in time possibly I may produce something *in itself* of more importance; then all may be packed off to the press together, and in the interim whatever I may write shall be kept secret among ourselves, that, being new to the public, it may appear *when* it appears, with more advantage.

Two copies accompany this:—the verses sent to the Queen; and the Queen's visit.

The clock strikes nine;—good night, my dear, and God bless thee!—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, 20 April 1789.

SINCE the woeful day when I commenced Reviewer my opportunities of letter-writing have been

few indeed. I purpose, however, for the future to manage that matter with more discretion, and not to suffer an occupation by which I can gain neither money nor fame, to deprive me of the pleasure of corresponding with my friends, to me more valuable than either. . . . I am now in the sixteenth book of the *Odyssey*, and after having been so long engaged in it, begin with some impatience to look forward to the end of an undertaking almost too long and laborious for any creature to meddle with, the date of whose existence here is limited to three score years and ten.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, April 22, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Having waited hitherto in expectation of the messenger whom, in your last, you mentioned a design to send, I have at length sagaciously surmised that you delay to send him in expectation of hearing first from me. I would that his errand hither were better worthy the journey. I shall have no very voluminous packet to charge him with when he comes. Such, however, as it is, it is ready; and has received an addition in the interim of one copy, which would not have made a part of it had your Mercury arrived here sooner. It is on the subject of the Queen's visit to London on the night of the illuminations. Mrs. Unwin, knowing the burthen that lies on my back too heavy for any but Atlantean shoulders, has kindly performed the copyist's part, and transcribed all that I had to send you. Observe, madam, I do not write thus

to hasten your messenger hither, but merely to account for my own silence. It is probable that the later he arrives, the more he will receive when he comes; for I never fail to write when I think I have found a favourable subject.

We mourn that we must give up the hope of seeing you and Mr. King at Weston. Had our correspondence commenced sooner, we had certainly found the means of meeting; but it seems that we were doomed to know each other too late for a meeting in this world. May a better world make us amends, as it certainly will, if I ever reach a better! Our interviews here are but imperfect pleasures at the best; and generally from such as promise us most gratification, we receive the most disappointment; but disappointment is, I suppose, confined to the planet on which we dwell;—the only one in the universe, probably, that is inhabited by sinners.

I did not know, or even suspect, that when I received your last messenger, I received so eminent a disciple of Hippocrates; a physician of such absolute control over disease and the human constitution, as to be able to put a pestilence into his pocket, confine it there, and to let it loose at his pleasure. We are much indebted to him, that he did not give us here a stroke of his ability.

I must not forget to mention that I have received (probably not without your privity), Mr. Twining's valuable volume. For a long time I supposed it to have come from my bookseller, who now and then sends me a new publication; but I find on inquiry, that it came not from him. I beg, madam, if you are aware that Mr. Twining

himself sent it, or your friend Mr. Martyn, that you will negotiate for me on the occasion, and contrive to convey to the obliging donor my very warmest thanks. I am impatient till he receives them. I have not yet had time to do justice to a writer so sensible, elegant, and entertaining, by a complete perusal of his work; but I have with pleasure sought out all those passages to which Mr. Martyn was so good as to refer me, and am delighted to observe the exact agreement in opinion on the subject of translation in general, and on that of Mr. Pope's in particular, that subsists between Mr. Twining and myself. 'Ornament for ever!' cries Pope; 'Simplicity for ever!' cries Homer. No two can be more opposite.

With Mrs. Unwin's best compliments, I remain,
my dear madam, your obliged and affectionate

WM. COWPER.

Our joint respects attend Mr. King.

TO MRS. KING

Thursday, April 30, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I thought to have sent you, by the return of your messenger a letter; at least, something like one: but instead of sleeping here, as I supposed he would, he purposes to pass the night at Lavendon, a village three miles off. This design of his is but just made known to me, and it is now near seven in the evening. Therefore, lest he should be obliged to feel out his way, in an unknown country, in the dark, I am forced to scribble a hasty word or two, instead

of devoting, as I intended, the whole evening to your service.

A thousand thanks for your basket, and all the good things that it contained; particularly for my brother's Poems,¹ whose hand-writing struck me the moment I saw it. They gave me some feelings of a melancholy kind, but not painful. I will return them to you by the next opportunity. I wish that mine, which I send you, may prove half as pleasant to you as your excellent cakes and apples have proved to us. You will then think yourself sufficiently recompensed for your obliging present. If a crab-stock can transform a pippin into a nonpareil, what may not I effect in a translation of Homer? Alas! I fear, nothing half so valuable.

I have learned, at length, that I am indebted for Twining's Aristotle to a relation of mine, General Cowper.

Pardon me that I quit you so soon. It is not willingly; but I have compassion on your poor messenger.

Adieu, my Dear Madam, and believe me, with Mrs. Unwin's best compliments, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON²

The Lodge, May 14, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I send you a copy of verses entitled and called a new song, wanting nothing but

¹ Some of these poems are to be published by the Rev. Dr. Stokes of Cambridge for the Cowper Society.

² Wife of Mr. John Throckmorton, who, on the death of Sir Robert Throckmorton in 1791, succeeded to the baronetcy.

a woodcut representing yourself, Miss Courtenay,¹ and me, to make it complete. I will beg the favour of you to pass it into the hands of that lady when you have done with it.

The little folks whom you have left behind are all in perfect health; they were so yesterday. We expect Miss Courtenay to drink tea with us this evening, as she did on Monday, when she and I diverted ourselves with a game at spillikins. Your tiny nephew was here also, but fast asleep the whole evening, the most profitable way, I suppose, in which he can spend his time at present.

I pity you, you are going to Court, where the heat and the crowd will half kill you; make haste back again, for your park and all your environs grow every day more and more delightful.—With my best love to Mr. Frog, I remain, my dear Madam, most truly yours, Wm. C.

Mrs. Unwin's best compts.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, May 20, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—Finding myself, between twelve and one, at the end of the seventeenth book of the *Odyssey*, I give the interval between the present moment and the time of walking to you. If I write letters before I sit down to Homer, I feel my spirits too flat for poetry; and too flat for letter-writing, if I address myself to Homer first; but the last I

¹ ? Miss Stapleton, afterwards Mrs. George Courtenay Throckmorton. See letter of 6th June 1789. I have not seen the original of this letter.

choose as the least evil, because my friends will pardon my dulness, but the public will not.

I had been some days uneasy on your account, when yours arrived. We should have rejoiced to have seen you, would your engagements have permitted: but in the autumn I hope, if not before, we shall have the pleasure to receive you. At what time we may expect Lady Hesketh, at present I know not; but imagine that at any time after the month of June you will be sure to find her with us, which I mention, knowing that to meet you will add a relish to all the pleasures she can find at Weston.

When I wrote those lines on the Queen's visit, I thought I had performed well; but it belongs to me, as I have told you before, to dislike whatever I write when it has been written a month. The performance was therefore sinking in my esteem, when your approbation of it, arriving in good time, buoyed it up again. It will now keep possession of the place it holds in my good opinion, because it has been favoured with yours; and a copy will certainly be at your service, whenever you choose to have one.

Nothing is more certain, than that when I wrote the line,

God made the country, and man made the town,¹

I had not the least recollection of that very similar one, which you quote from Hawkins Browne. It convinces me that critics (and none more than Warton, in his notes on Milton's minor poems), have often charged authors with borrowing what

¹ *Task*, Book i.

they drew from their own fund. Browne was an entertaining companion when he had drunk his bottle, but not before; this proved a snare to him, and he would sometimes drink too much; but I know not that he was chargeable with any other irregularities. He had those among his intimates who would not have been such had he been otherwise viciously inclined;—the Duncombes, in particular, father and son, who were of unblemished morals.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, May 30, 1789.

DEAREST MADAM,—Many thanks for your kind and valuable despatches, none of which, except your letter, I have yet had time to read; for true it is, and a sad truth too, that I was in bed when your messenger arrived. He waits only for my answer, for which reason I answer as speedily as I can.

I am glad if my poetical packet pleased you. Those stanzas on the Queen's visit were presented some time since, by Miss Goldsworthy, to the Princess Augusta, who has probably given them to the Queen; but of their reception I have heard nothing. I gratified myself by complimenting two sovereigns whom I love and honour; and that gratification will be my reward. It would, indeed, be unreasonable to expect that persons who keep a Laureate in constant pay should have either praise or emolument to spare for every volunteer scribbler who may choose to make them his subject.

Mrs. Unwin, who is much obliged to you for your inquiries, is but little better since I wrote last. No person ever recovered more imperceptibly; yet

certain it is that she does recover. I am persuaded myself that, though it was not suspected at the time, the thigh bone was longitudinally fractured, and she is of my opinion. Much time is requisite to the restoration of a bone so injured, and nothing can be done to expedite the cure. My mother-in-law¹ broke her leg bone in the same manner, and was long a cripple. The only comfort in the present case is, that had the bone been broken transversely, the consequences must probably have been mortal.

I will take the greatest care of the papers with which you have entrusted me, and will return them by the next opportunity. It is very unfortunate that the people of Bedford should choose to have the small-pox, just at the season when it would be sure to prevent our meeting. God only knows, madam, when we shall meet, or whether at all in this world; but certain it is, that whether we meet or not, I am most truly yours, WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin presents her best respects, and I beg you will make mine to Mr. King.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, June 5, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am going to give you a deal of trouble, but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks; for in London only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo clock; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner

¹ Mrs. Rebecca Cowper. She survived her husband Dr. Cowper. She was buried in the Abbey Church of Bath.

as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold, I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part of Holborn which leads into Broad St. Giles's. It seems they are well-going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce.

We are here on the point of a general insurrection of Mops and Brooms, and the house for a week to come, at the least, will hardly be habitable even to ourselves.

I return you many thanks for Boswell's *Tour*. I read it to Mrs. Unwin after supper, and we find it amusing. There is much trash in it, as there must always be in every narrative that relates indiscriminately all that passed. But now and then the Doctor speaks like an oracle, and that makes amends for all. Sir John was a coxcomb, and Boswell is not less a coxcomb, though of another kind. I fancy Johnson made coxcombs of all his friends, and they in return made him a coxcomb; for, with reverence be it spoken, such he certainly was, and flattered as he was, he was sure to be so.

Thanks for your invitation to London,—but unless London can come to me, I fear we shall never meet. I was sure that you would love my friend, when you should once be well acquainted with him; and equally sure that he would take kindly to you.¹

Now for Homer.

W. C.

¹ In this letter, as we learn from an old bookseller's catalogue in which fragments are given, he also mentions his verses on the illumination night, and says further: 'Persuade Fuseli if you can to send me all his Shakespeare paintings in a box; I will gladly pay the carriage and honestly return them.'

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 6, 1789.

I KNOW not, my dearest coz, that I have any thing to trouble thee about, save half a dozen tooth-brushes. Mrs. Unwin will be much obliged to thee also for a black summer cloak *untrimmed*, because Hannah is making a trimming for it. Two of the brushes above-said must be for inside *scurryfunging* viz. they must be *hooked*. These wants satisfied, we have no other commissions with which to charge thee. The stiffer the brushes, the better.

My friend Walter Bagot, to whom I sent a copy of the Illumination verses, objected as thou didst to the concluding stanzas; but I could not alter them on the credit of his judgment only; when thine and that of thy friends had confirmed it, I then thought it prudent to surrender my own, and am now glad that I did, for I think the copy much mended, and mended almost as much by the omission of the others.

I have the satisfaction to find that the copy of which Miss Stapleton¹ is the subject, gratified much both her and her father. She wrote to Mrs. Frog lately, and told her, among other handsome things that she said on the occasion, that she showed them with not a little pride to all her acquaintance who could *read* and had *sense* to understand them. She expressed herself thus, because it happened that a young gentleman who could *not read*, being commissioned to read them at her father's table, he not

¹ 'Catharina,' afterwards the wife of Mr. George Throckmorton. See Globe Ed. p. 315.

only murdered them by his bad delivery, but feloniously attempted to maim them likewise by a puny criticism of one of the lines. It was, however, sufficiently vindicated by the company, and the young sprig of a critic, severely rallied by Mr. Stapleton, was made to blush for his misemployed sagacity. Mrs. Frog told me she never saw her friend so angry in her life.

I have composed since a small poem¹ on a hideous subject, with which the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April furnished me; it is nevertheless a true one, hideous as it is. Mr. Bull and Mr. Greatheed both have seen the man on whose death it is written, and know that he died as there related. It is entitled *The Cockfighter's Garland*. Expecting to see thee soon, I shall not send it.

Running over what I have written, I feel that I should blush to send it to any but thyself. Another would charge me with being impelled by a vanity from which my conscience sets me clear, to speak so much of myself and my verses as I do. But I thus speak to none but thee, nor to thee do I thus speak from any such motives. I egotise in my letters to thee, not because I am of much importance to myself, but because to thee, both *Ego* and all that *Ego* does, is interesting. God doth know that when I labour most to excel as a poet, I do it under such mortifying impressions of the vanity of all human fame and glory, however acquired, that I wonder I can write at all.

Mr. Frog made his wife a short visit in his way from Bucklands to London, and on Thursday they dined with us,—the only dinner they have had

¹ Globe Ed. p. 371.

here these seven months. He is gone again, and expects to be detained from home about a fortnight longer. In July they go to Tunbridge, and thence to Margate; after which they make another jaunt, I know not whither with certainty, but I think to Bucklands. Thus we are likely to be pretty much a trio, and to have none but ourselves to depend on for our entertainment. Well, we can fadge. On Monday I shall dine at Newport with Mr. Greatheed; he comes to give me a cast thither in his chaise and one. The artist who is to copy my phiz is expected in August. This falls out well, because you, I hope, will be here, who will settle what sort of a head he shall give me better than anybody. I am now going to revise the last half of the eighteenth book of the *Odyssey*, and to-morrow shall begin the nineteenth. Mrs. Unwin makes her best compliments, and I am, ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—Mrs. U. recollects that when you were here, and we had a dinner to get for the Frogs, you regretted that *sponge biscuits* (so she thinks you called them) were not to be had. Perhaps you would like to bring a small parcel of that commodity with you.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 13, 1789.

I STEAL a few moments from the old Grecian, my dear cousin, just to hint to you, in the way of admonition, that when this reaches your fair hands the half of June will be over. You will know

without my telling you to what subject in particular this gentle insinuation applies.

Mrs. Unwin will be glad to have the cloak with a lining, but we hope for such a season in due time as shall supersede all occasion for wadding. At present we boast not much either of bright suns or genial airs. In this wonderful climate we have often sunless summers and clear-shining winters; but when once we meet we will not trouble ourselves about the weather.

It was with a little regret that I discarded the stanza ending with

‘ But when a nation’s shouts arise
That suffrage must be true.’

The dismissal, however, of the preceding stanza was necessarily attended with the dismissal of that also, which had then no longer any propriety, wanting an introduction. I shall be glad if the piece in its present form be considered as a compliment in any measure worthy of those to whom it is paid. I have felt perhaps equal indignation with yourself at the behaviour of our three princes. Were the nation of my mind, I know not to what throne they would stand related hereafter, certainly not to that of England, unless by manners very different from such as they have yet exhibited, they proved themselves more worthy of that honour.

I dined, as I told you I should, at Newport last Monday, and had an agreeable day. Mr. Greatheed came for me, and carried me thither in a single-horsed chaise almost as high as a phaeton. At first I was rather alarmed at such an extraordinary elevation, having never been accustomed to ride

in such triumphant sort; but having learned soon after I mounted that Mrs. Greatheed frequently committed herself to it, I felt it a shame to fear that which held no terrors for a lady. I think them nevertheless dangerous;—should the horse fall, woe to the necks of the riders!

I forgot to tell thee that when thou wast here thou didst bid me refer the Rosebud¹ to thee for the coal money. It was accordingly at my instance that he sued thee for it.

Poor Mrs. Frog is still a widow, and I fear that her husband and she will receive no other recompense of their separation than a disappointment. The Chancellor is no friend to the measure which the Catholics are now pressing in Parliament.

I shall be glad if you can bring the Rosebud with you. His walking scheme is a terrible one. Mrs. U. has twice taken a morning walk with me, but rather [].² We are two hours performing a journey that used to cost us one.

Mrs. Hill's turkey is become the father of fifteen beautiful children;—one of them white, and two or three of them buff. If you see her, pray tell her how much she has enriched us.

I am, my dearest coz, with Mrs. Unwin's best affections,—Ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—Many thanks for the waistcoats. I have received a present of a silk one, together with a silver snuff-box, from a person who lays me under an unpleasant restraint, forbidding me absolutely to say from whom. Mrs. U. has a snuff-box also *from the same* quarter.

¹ Samuel Rose.

² Words illegible.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, June 16, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You will naturally suppose that the letter in which you announced your marriage occasioned me some concern, though in my answer I had the wisdom to conceal it. The account you gave me of the object of your choice was such as left me at liberty to form conjectures not very comfortable to myself, if my friendship for you were indeed sincere. I have since however been sufficiently consoled. Your brother Chester has informed me, that you have married not only one of the most agreeable, but one of the most accomplished women in the kingdom. It is an old maxim that it is better to exceed expectation than to disappoint it, and with this maxim in your view it was, no doubt, that you dwelt only on circumstances of disadvantage, and would not treat me with a recital of others which abundantly overweigh them. I may congratulate not you only, but myself, and truly rejoice that my friend has chosen for his fellow-traveller through the remaining stages of his journey, a companion who will do honour to his discernment, and make his way, so far as it can depend on a wife to do so, pleasant to the last.

My verses on the Queen's visit to London either have been printed, or soon will be in the *World*. The finishing to which you objected I have altered, and have substituted two new stanzas instead of it. Two others also I have struck out, another critic having objected to *them*. I think I am a very tractable sort of a poet. Most of my fraternity would as

soon shorten the noses of their children because they were said to be too long, as thus dock their compositions in compliance with the opinion of others. I beg that when my life shall be written hereafter, my authorship's ductability of temper may not be forgotten.—I am, my dear friend, ever yours,
W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, June 20, 1789.

AMICO MIO,—I am truly sorry that it must be so long before we can have an opportunity to meet. My cousin, in her last letter but one, inspired me with other expectations, expressing a purpose, if the matter could be so contrived, of bringing you with her; I was willing to believe that you had consulted together on the subject, and found it feasible. A month was formerly a trifle in my account; but at my present age I give it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass, in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave for ever:—but I shall live till August.

Many thanks for the cuckoo, which arrived perfectly safe, and goes well, to the amusement and amazement of all who hear it. Hannah lies awake to hear it, and I am not sure that we have not others in the house that admire his music as much as she.

Having read both Hawkins and Boswell, I now think myself almost as much a master of Johnson's character, as if I had known him personally, and can not but regret *that our bards of other times*

found no such biographers as these. They have both been ridiculed, and the wits have had their laugh; but such a history of Milton or Shakespeare, as they have given of Johnson—O how desirable!¹

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 23, 1789.

ONE more scrap of a letter, my dearest coz, and then I hope it will be long before I shall have occasion to epistolize thee again. I rejoice that the day is at last fixed for your coming, and woe be to any, whether male or female, who shall now interpose to hinder it! We have had much foul weather, and the weather is still foul. This is *tant mieux*. It will be fair when you arrive, and the country the pleasanter for the deluge that has been poured down upon it. My laurels already give proof of the benefit they have received. A few days ago they were in appearance lifeless, but they are now almost covered with young leaves, save and except those under your parlour window, which, I am sorry to say, are still but melancholy figures. Why they should have fared worse than the rest I am at a loss to imagine, for they certainly have been more sheltered, and have a better aspect.

Mr. Frog has just passed by on his return to London. I dined with him yesterday. Mrs. Unwin, being no longer able to walk in pattens or clogs, was prevented by the dirt. The Catholic application to Parliament, I find, is not likely to speed at

¹ He also speaks of his old Chambers in the Temple, looking into Pump Court, in which there are lime trees, and where the sound of water, though pouring only into pails and pitchers, is rather agreeable.

present. The Bishop of London is not favourable to it; he leads all the other Bishops, and the Bishops all together lead Mr. Pitt. The Chancellor, on the other hand, is much their friend. But whether Chancellor alone will be able hereafter to preponderate against such a weight of episcopacy seems doubtful.

I learn from the Frogs that I am somewhat formidable to Mrs. B. Chester, and that she trembles at the thought of encountering a man of my extraordinary consequence. I am glad of this. Nothing could so effectually relieve me from the fears that I should otherwise have of her. Let her not detain you longer than the appointed Tuesday, and I will promise to frighten her as little as possible.

Thanks for the pains thou hast taken to promulgate my Illumination verses, especially that thou didst take so sure a way to mortify the printer of the *World*. I dare say the rogue is now ready to hang himself. It would be a pleasant thing to see him the subject of an article in his own paper.—‘The cause of this rash action, we understand, was the concern he felt at having neglected to print those incomparable stanzas by the author of the *Task*, which appeared lately in the *Times*.’—Thus would complete justice be done to my violated importance, and an example held up in the eyes of all such vermin to deter them from taking such liberty with me in future.

Adieu, my dear. The bells are effectually muffled, and you have no salute to fear from the steeple. Lady Spencer is doubtless a respectable patroness, and I can have no objection to her, should you persist in declining yourself the honour that I designed

you. But to tell you the truth, I had rather have seen your name prefixed to my labours than even hers or any body's.

We truly rejoice in the King's complete restoration—a restoration as worthy to be remembered as any that has ever been commemorated in this country. The jaunt he proposes will probably be of great use to him, and, to the mortification of some enemies that he has in his own household, prove the means of lengthening his reign and our prosperity.

God give thee a good journey,—so prays Mrs. Unwin, and so, my dear cousin,—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

The Lodge, July 18, 1789.

MY DEAREST MADAM,—You must not suppose that you have had all the rain at Tunbridge; we also had our share; yet deluged as we have been, they have been still more drenched at Olney. There, no man could venture into the street who was not booted, and the inhabitants had a flood in their houses. Guess then the condition of your hay; yesterday and to-day it was not visible, but this morning as I walked down Hill-field¹ I saw that it had emerged again. Some of the farmers, I understand, have resolved not to mow their meadow grass at all, but to turn in their cattle, as soon as the waters have subsided, that they may trample the crop into the soil and

¹ The field between the first spinnie (Overbrook Spinnie) and Weston Park.

convert it into manure. But the scheme, I think, will hardly answer.

Your account of the attack that you sustained on quitting your carriage diverted me much ; and I remember having sustained myself a similar one on a like occasion. I promised them all my custom, dealing my gracious smiles about to the right and left, without giving preference to any. But the next morning decamped, a measure which sufficiently explained my behaviour to them the evening before, and as none of them had any reason to think himself particularly my favourite they all bore my sudden departure with an equanimity that did them honour.

Many thanks, my dear madam, for your extract from George's letter. I retain but little Italian, yet that little was so forcibly mustered by the consciousness that I was myself the subject, that I presently became master of it. I have always said that George is a poet, and I am never in his company but I discover proofs of it ; and the delicate address by which he has managed his complimentary mention of me, convinces me of it still more than ever. Here are a thousand poets of us, who have impudence enough to write for the public ; but amongst the modest men who are by diffidence restrained from such an enterprise are those who would eclipse us all. I wish that George would make the experiment. I would bind on his laurels with my own hand.

Your gardener has gone after his wife, but having neglected to take his lyre, *alias* fiddle, with him, has not yet brought home his Eurydice. Your clock in the hall has stopped, and (strange

to tell!) it stopped at sight of the watchmaker; for he only looked at it, and it has been motionless ever since. Mr. Gregson¹ is gone, and the Hall is a desolation. Pray don't think any place pleasant that you may find in your rambles, that we may see you the sooner. Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it every day, and often inquire at the lattice; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return. I took notice of the inscription on your seal, and had we an artist here capable of furnishing me with such an one, you should read on mine, 'Encore une Lettre. Adieu, je serai inconsolable.' I depend on your kindness that you will not suffer me to be so.

Lady Hesketh's and Mrs. Unwin's best love attend you. You will assuredly find my cousin here at your return. She is in our clutches, and we shall not suddenly release her. May you derive in the mean time all possible benefit from the waters! These incessant rains, I know, dilute the mineral too much and make it less efficacious, but change of air is itself beneficial, and I hope you will find it so. I met Mr. Buchanan² the other evening in my walk, and as I passed him called him Mr. Buchan. This was a sort of blunder I was ever making when I lived in the world, and, were I to return to it, would make it as often as ever. Adieu, my dear Mrs. Frog, with my best love to your husband.—I remain, affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

¹ Dr. Gregson, Roman Catholic priest at Weston—'Griggy.'

² Rev. John Buchanan, curate of Weston.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, PERCY STREET, RATHBONE
PLACE, LONDON

The Lodge, July 23, 1789.

You do well, my dear sir, to improve your opportunity; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years misspent in an attorney's office were almost of course followed by several more equally misspent in the Temple, and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, '*Sto qui.*'—The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape, (so far as my admonitions can have any weight with them), my folly and my fate. When you feel yourself tempted to relax a little of the strictness of your present discipline, and to indulge in amusement incompatible with your future interests, think on your friend at Weston.

Having said this, I shall next, with my whole heart, invite you hither, and assure you that I look forward to approaching August with great pleasure, because it promises me your company. After a little time, (which we shall wish longer), spent with us, you will return invigorated to your studies, and pursue them with the more advantage. In the mean time you have lost little, in point of season, by being confined to London. Incessant rains and meadows under water have given to the summer the air of winter, and the country has been deprived of half its beauties.

We begin to be seriously alarmed for the harvest. The hay has most of it already perished, and the corn, having spired into a stalk of uncommon length, will consequently be productive of little. A very intelligent neighbour assured me two days ago, that the present wet weather continuing another fortnight will certainly cause a great dearth, if not a famine. The millers and bakers even now find it difficult to procure wheat, and a bad crop succeeding will reduce us to a penury in the article of bread, such as is seldom felt in England.

It is time to tell you that we are all well, and often make you our subject. Lady Hesketh desires to be kindly remembered to you, as does Mrs. Unwin. We comfort ourselves as well as we can under all these threatening appearances with cheerful chat and the thought that we are once more together. This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country, and a great instance of good fortune I account it in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed. Add to

this wonder as soon as you can by making yourself of the party.—I am truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, Aug. 1, 1789.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The post brings me no letters that do not grumble at my silence. Had not you, therefore, taken me to task as roundly as others, I should have concluded you, perhaps, more indifferent to my epistles than the rest of my correspondents; of whom one says—‘I shall be glad when you have finished Homer; then possibly you will find a little leisure for an old friend.’ Another says—‘I don’t choose to be neglected, unless you equally neglect every one else.’ Thus I hear of it with both ears, and shall till I appear in the shape of two great quarto volumes, the composition of which, I confess, engrosses me to a degree that gives my friends, to whom I feel myself much obliged for their anxiety to hear from me, but too much reason to complain. Johnson told Mr. Martyn¹ the truth; but your inference from that truth is not altogether so just as most of your conclusions are. Instead of finding myself the more at leisure because my long labour draws to a close, I find myself the more occupied. As when a horse approaches the goal, he does not, unless he be jaded, slacken his pace, but quickens it: even so it fares with me. The end is in view; I seem almost to have reached the mark; and the nearness of it inspires me with fresh alacrity. But, be

¹ Professor Thomas Martyn, the botanist.

it known to you that I have still two books of the *Odyssey* before me, and, when they are finished, shall have almost the whole eight-and-forty to revise. Judge then, my dear Madam, if it is yet time for me to play, or to gratify myself with scribbling to those I love. No. It is still necessary that waking I should be all absorpt in Homer, and that sleeping I should dream of nothing else.

I am a great lover of good paintings, but no connoisseur, having never had an opportunity to become one. In the last forty years of my life, I have hardly seen six pictures that were worth looking at; for I was never a frequenter of auctions, having never any spare money in my pocket; and the public exhibitions of them in London had hardly taken place when I left it. My cousin, who is with us, saw the gentleman whose pieces you mention, on the top of a scaffold, copying a famous picture in the Vatican. She has seen [some] of his performances, and much admires them.

You have had a great loss, and a loss that admits of no consolation, except such as will naturally suggest itself to *you*; such, I mean, as the Scripture furnishes. We must all leave, or be left; and it is the circumstance of all others that makes long life the least desirable, that others go while we stay,—till at last we find ourselves alone, like a tree on a hill-top.

Accept, my dear Madam, mine and Mrs. Unwin's best compliments to yourself and Mr. King, and believe me, however unfrequent in telling you that I am so,—Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Aug. 8, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Come when you will, or when you can, you cannot come at a wrong time, but we shall expect you on the day mentioned.

If you have any book that you think will make pleasant evening reading, bring it with you. I now read Mrs. Piozzi's *Travels* to the ladies after supper, and shall probably have finished them before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you. It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we who make books ourselves are more merciful to bookmakers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write; there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the *Dunciad* should have written these lines,

The mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.

Alas! for Pope, if the mercy be showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! he was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition.

I scratch this between dinner and tea; a time when I cannot write much without disordering my noddle, and bringing a flush into my face. You will excuse me therefore if, through respect for the two important considerations of health and beauty, I conclude myself, ever yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

August 12, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I rejoice that you and Mrs. Hill are so agreeably occupied in your retreat.¹ August, I hope, will make us amends for the gloom of its many wintry predecessors. We are now gathering from our meadows, not hay, but muck; such stuff as deserves not the carriage, which yet it must have, that the after-crop may have leave to grow. The Ouse has hardly deigned to run in his channel since the summer began.

My muse were a vixen, if she were not always ready to fly in obedience to your commands. But what can be done? I can write nothing, in the few hours that remain to me of this day, that will be fit for your purpose; and, unless I could despatch what I write by to-morrow's post, it would not reach you in time. I must add, too, that my friend the vicar² of the next parish engaged me, the day before yesterday, to furnish him by next Sunday with a hymn, to be sung on the occasion of his preaching to the children of the Sunday-school: of which hymn I have not yet produced a syllable. I am somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling, in *Tom Jones*; and could I split myself into as many poets as there are Muses, could find employment for them all.—Adieu, my dear friend, I am ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

¹ Wargrave, near Henley-on-Thames.² Rev. James Bean, of Olney.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Aug. 16, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes;—little worth your having; but payment, such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity.

That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should have proved the occasion of my suspending my correspondence with you, is a proof how little we foresee the consequences of what we publish. Homer, I dare say, hardly at all suspected that at the fag-end of time two personages would appear, the one ycleped Sir Newton, and the other Sir Cowper, who, loving each other heartily, would nevertheless suffer the pains of an interrupted intercourse, his poems the cause. So, however, it has happened; and though it would not, I suppose, extort from the old bard a single sigh, if he knew it, yet to me it suggests the serious

reflection above mentioned. An author by profession had need narrowly to watch his pen, lest a line should escape it which by possibility may do mischief, when he has been long dead and buried. What we have done, when we have written a book, will never be known till the day of judgment: then the account will be liquidated, and all the good that it has occasioned, and all the evil, will witness either for or against us.

I am now in the last book of the *Odyssey*, yet have still, I suppose, half a year's work before me. The accurate revisal of two such voluminous poems can hardly cost me less. I rejoice, however, that the goal is in prospect; for though it has cost me years to run this race, it is only now that I begin to have a glimpse of it. That I shall never receive any proportionable pecuniary recompense for my long labours, is pretty certain; and as to any fame that I may possibly gain by it, *that* is a commodity that daily sinks in value, in measure as the consummation of all things approaches. In the day when the lion shall dandle the kid, and a little child shall lead them, the world will have lost all relish for the fabulous legends of antiquity, and Homer and his translator may budge off the stage together.

The ladies are coming down, and breakfast is at hand. Should I throw aside my letter unfinished, it is not probable that I shall be able to send it by this opportunity. Therefore that you may not wait longer for that for which you have waited too long already, I will only add that I always love and value you both as much as you can possibly wish, and that I am, with Mrs.

Unwin's affectionate remembrances, my dear friend,
ever yours, W. M. COWPER.

You know that Lady Hesketh is with us; you have had her compliments before, and I send them now, because she would bid me, if she knew that I write to you. We have a snug summer. Our neighbours are out on a ramble, and we have all their pleasant places to ourselves. Not that their return in September will interrupt our pleasures, for they are always kind and agreeable, but it will give them a different cast.

Pray remember me to Mr. Bacon.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

*Weston Underwood, near Olney, Bucks,
last day of August, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have been often in pain about you, and have anxiously mentioned you to Mrs. Unwin several times, fearing lest illness or some evil had befallen you. Your letter, enclosing a bill of exchange for sixteen guineas, has rambled eleven days in quest of me; neither can I easily conjecture by what means it reached me at last, having set off with a wrong direction, as the date of this will inform you. I cannot sufficiently express my sense of your kindness. Labouring as you do in my cause, you give me unequivocal proofs of a friendship superior to the influence of time, and to which I seem to make but a cold return, at least an inadequate one, when I only thank you for it. But what can I more? Poets are seldom good for

any thing except in rhyme. It is however true that I both love and honour you for your fidelity and kindness.

I have from the beginning been aware that my translation of Homer will have much prejudice to encounter, more perhaps than would have attended any other work that I could possibly have undertaken. I confess it a bold enterprise; not because Pope has succeeded in it, for he certainly has not; but because he is by thousands ignorantly supposed to have succeeded, and because it may perhaps be impossible to render justice to the original in our language. All I can say is, that I will do my best, and of one thing at least I will assure you, that according to all I have seen or heard of other translations of the same author, none of them have in any respect at all resembled mine. Whether mine shall be found to differ to a good purpose, *probandum est*.

In answer to your question when I go to press? I reply, when my bookseller pleases. I am now finishing the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, and being advanced so far, could easily keep before the printers were they to begin to-morrow. But Johnson recommends it to me by no means to print till the whole is finished, alleging for his reason that the printers cannot possibly plan the work till they shall have the whole before them. And my most intelligent friends advise me to be determined by Johnson, who has universally the character of a sensible and an honest man.

I rejoice much in the account you give me of your domestic happiness. May it continue, and, if possible, increase! You may safely present my love

to Miss Rowley. A present of that sort from a man old enough to be her father can do her no harm,—at least at this distance. Were we nearer to each other, perhaps the approach might not be altogether so safe for me.

My uncle, as you observe, died full of years, but not rich. The profits of the very lucrative office which he held so long, were not his, but General Cowper's, whose interest in them determined on the death of Ashley. A gold repeater and a tooth-pick case are all that I have gained by the loss of a relation, whom all who knew him, most highly loved and valued, and whose like I shall not presently see again.

Mr. Madan lives at Epsom, since the publication of his *Thelyphthora*, little noticed I believe either by our family or his former friends. He and I have no correspondence. He neither has nor wants preferment; his paternal estate, as I have heard, bringing him in between four and five thousand per annum. I pity the man, and time was when I felt much abhorrence of his book; but it is now a dead thing, out of mind, and no longer a subject either of liking or aversion.

I have scribbled in haste, being desirous that you may have the earliest possible advice of the safe though late arrival of yours. Nothing could have been more welcome to me than either your son William or any of yours. Would I could see you all at the lake side. I am happy that you are in health. May God keep you so. Except scratching now and then a letter as fast as I can do, I do nothing but translate.—Ever yours, my dearest friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Sept. 24, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You left us exactly at the wrong time. Had you stayed till now, you would have had the pleasure of hearing even my cousin say—‘I am cold.’—And the still greater pleasure of being warm yourself; for I have had a fire in the study ever since you went. It is the fault of our summers, that they are hardly ever warm or cold enough. Were they warmer, we should not want a fire; and were they colder, we should have one.

I have twice seen and conversed with Mr. Jekyll. He is witty, intelligent, and agreeable beyond the common measure of men who are so. But it is the constant effect of a spirit of party to make those hateful to each other, who are truly amiable in themselves.

Let me beg of you to settle for me, by a reference to your subscription-edition of Pope’s Homer, the knotty point that I mentioned to you, whether it be customary for the patron of the work to be a subscriber.

Beau¹ sends his love; he was melancholy the whole day after your departure. W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

Weston, Oct. 4, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The hamper is come, and come safe; and the contents I can affirm on my own knowledge are excellent. It chanced that another hamper and a box came by the same conveyance,

¹ Cowper’s dog.

all which I unpacked and expounded in the hall; my cousin sitting, mean time, on the stairs, spectatress of the business. We diverted ourselves with imagining the manner in which Homer would have described the scene. Detailed in his circumstantial way, it would have furnished materials for a paragraph of considerable length in an *Odyssey*.

The straw-stuff'd hamper with his ruthless steel
 He open'd, cutting sheer the' inserted cords,
 Which bound the lid and lip secure. Forth came
 The rustling package first, bright straw of wheat,
 Or oats, or barley; next a bottle green
 Throat-full, clear spirits the contents, distill'd
 Drop after drop odorous, by the art
 Of the fair mother of his friend—the Rose.

And so on.

I should rejoice to be the hero of such a tale in the hands of Homer.

You will remember, I trust, that when the state of your health or spirits calls for rural walks and fresh air, you have always a retreat at Weston.

We are all well, all love you, down to the very dog; and shall be glad to hear that you have exchanged languor for alacrity, and the debility that you mention for indefatigable vigour.—Adieu,

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE, PERCY STREET, RATHBONE PLACE,
 LONDON

The Lodge, Nov. 5, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,—Recollecting after you were gone that I could not send you my tale without more expense to you than it is worth, I have trans-

mitted it, as we say here, *next ways* to Johnson, and hope that in the amusements of your office you will find sufficient solace for so great a disappointment. The same economical tenderness for you, and the same modest opinion of my own works, are the only considerations that prevent my sending you herein enclosed another new piece, a piece also finished since you went, a *memento mori* written for the benefit of the Northamptonians, but chiefly for the benefit of Mr. Cox, my anniversary client, and the clerk of All Saints' parish. All this I communicate to make you regret the more your short continuance at Weston, for you see that had you been more persuadable on that subject, you would have had the earliest possible sight of both.

The day you went a bottle of spruce was produced, and the cork drawn in the study. A column of the contents immediately spouted to the ceiling, nor did it cease to sally in this violent manner till more than two-thirds of the liquor were expended. You will imagine that the remaining third was excellent.¹ But it did not prove so. As Mr. Pulteney, while a patriot, speaking in the House of Commons on the subject of public measures, observed that the apparent energy of them was an ill symptom, that they bespoke the delirium of a fever in its best stage, and were not so much efforts as agonies; so it proved in the present instance. All the life, strength and spirit of the good creature were wasted in that last struggle.

Placidâque ibi demum morte quievit.

¹ Cowper writes at the bottom of the page: 'This would have done honour to an Irishman.'

The remaining bottles have been given to the servants, but the servants liked it no better than ourselves.

Beau cannot forget Flora. Twice since you left us he has run away to Gayhurst alone, and this morning I have sent Samuel to bring him back again, judging that he will perhaps watch him more narrowly hereafter, when he finds that his escapes are attended with so much trouble to himself. I could by no means spare my dog, and yet it is not unlikely that I may lose him. He is very portable, and would be an acquisition to any stranger.

Lady Hesketh forgot to thank you for the Croydon verses, and therefore thanks you by me. She has taken a copy of them, and we all think them witty and elegant. It is earnestly recommended to you to follow punctually the good physical advice given you at Weston. We wish much to hear that your health is amended. Your brethren of the quill now at the Hall, less industrious than yourself, mean to lengthen their holiday time to the end of this week or the beginning of next. Adieu, my dear Sir, believe me with the ladies' compliments, who are just coming down to breakfast, affectionately yours,

W. COWPER.

Mr. Throckmorton has made me, since your departure, a handsome present; Villoison's edition of the *Iliad*, elegantly bound by Edwards. If I live long enough, by the contributions of my friends I shall once more be possessed of a library.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

22 Nov. 1789.

I THANK you for your history of Dr. White and his borrowed plumes. The man who could with any degree of complacence dress himself in a plumage so procured, was very likely to refuse payment for it when demanded. . . . London is not only an abomination in my account, because it runs away with my friends, but because it steals them at a season when we should be especially glad of their company.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Weston, Dec. 1, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—On this fine first of December, under an unclouded sky, and in a room full of sunshine, I address myself to the payment of a debt long in arrear, but never forgotten by me, however I may have seemed to forget it. I will not waste time in apologies. I have but one, and that one will suggest itself unmentioned. I will only add, that you are the first to whom I write, of several to whom I have not written many months, who all have claims upon me; and who, I flatter myself, are all grumbling at my silence. In your case, perhaps, I have been less anxious than in the case of some others; because, if you have not heard from myself, you have heard from Mrs. Unwin. From her you have learned that I live, and that I am as well as usual, and that I translate Homer: three short items, but in which is comprised the whole detail

of my present history. Thus I fared when you were here; thus I have fared ever since you were here; and thus, if it please God, I shall continue to fare for some time longer: for, though the work is done, it is not finished: a riddle which you, who are a brother of the press, will solve easily. I have also been the less anxious, because I have had frequent opportunities to hear of you; and have always heard that you are in good health and happy. Of Mrs. Newton, too, I have heard more favourable accounts of late, which has given us both the sincerest pleasure. Mrs. Unwin's case is, at present, my only subject of uneasiness, that is not immediately personal, and properly my own. She has almost constant headaches; almost a constant pain in her side, which nobody understands; and her lameness, within the last half-year, is very little amended. But her spirits are good, because supported by comforts which depend not on the state of the body; and I do not know that, with all these pains, her looks are at all altered since we had the happiness to see you here, unless, perhaps, they are altered a little for the better. I have thus given you as circumstantial an account of ourselves as I could; the most interesting matter, I verily believe, with which I could have filled my paper, unless I could have made spiritual mercies to myself the subject. In my next, perhaps, I shall find leisure to bestow a few lines on what is doing in France,¹ and in the Austrian

¹ The French Revolution. On 14th July 1789 the Bastille was stormed. On 5th October the mob marched to Versailles, and compelled the king and his family to remove to Paris. During the period from October to December many of the nobles emigrated.

Netherlands; though, to say the truth, I am much better qualified to write an essay on the siege of Troy than to descant on any of these modern revolutions. I question if, in either of the countries just mentioned, full of bustle and tumult as they are, there be a single character whom Homer, were he living, would deign to make his hero. The populace are the heroes now, and the stuff of which gentlemen heroes are made seems to be all expended. I will endeavour that my next letter shall not follow this so tardily as this has followed the last; and with our joint affectionate remembrances to yourself and Mrs. Newton, remain as ever, sincerely yours, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Dec. 13, 1789.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Unable to resist the temptation of a basket, I take the opportunity that it affords, to send you a hasty and short scribblement, though at an undue hour; for I write after breakfast, having overslept my usual time of rising. Homer will pardon me a trespass so seldom committed, and by which he will be but little a loser.

In the first place I thank thee heartily, that with the patience and the perseverance of an angler, in ponds *where fish are*, thou hast at length contrived to hook that great gudgeon mentioned in thy last. I do not think at the same time that thou wast guilty of any flattery in thy management of the matter; for to tell such a man

that the absence of his name from my list of subscribers would have been a dishonour to my book, considering especially what book it is, was telling him the truth. And now I will speak a proud word. He will be glad when he gets the book that he did subscribe to it; and this proud word I speak almost as much with a view to thy encouragement as to gratify my own vanity and self-complacence. Authors are not often good judges of themselves; but thou must know that I am an exception.

Again I thank thee for wine,—for two dozen of excellent Madeira, not a bottle of which was broken by the way. Impatient to taste it, though it was hardly allowing it a fair trial, I opened a bottle of it last night, and found it very superior to my last stock of that commodity, which I doubt not had been kept too long. Thanks also for newspapers, which I forgot like a beast to acknowledge in my last!

I sincerely rejoice with thee that thou hast succeeded in procuring a midshipmanship (there's a word for you!) for the poor young man in question. May he live to command where he now serves.

We should sooner have had a daily post could the people of Olney have settled the affair among themselves. Better now than never. I must not forget to beg that you make my best compliments to the lady, whoever she is, to whom I am indebted for a subscription so handsomely given.

Our poor neighbours have both been indisposed, Mrs. Frog with a terrible cold, from which she

is just recovered after a fortnight's illness, and Mr. Frog with his first fit of the gout, which seized him about a week since by the foot, and which confines him still.

As to ourselves we are much *in statu quo*, except that Mrs. U. has a slight nervous fever, accompanied with headaches, which she had not when you were here. She drinks lemonade, and finds it her best remedy.

Received from my master, on account current with Lady Hesketh, the sum of—one kiss on my forehead. Witness my paw, Beau x his mark.

Mrs. U. sends her affectionate compliments.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Weston, Dec. 18, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The present appears to me a wonderful period in the history of mankind. That nations so long contentedly slaves should on a sudden become enamoured of liberty, and understand, as suddenly, their own natural right to it, feeling themselves at the same time inspired with resolution to assert it, seems difficult to account for from natural causes. With respect to the final issue of all this, I can only say, that if, having discovered the value of liberty, they should next discover the value of peace, and lastly the value of the word of God, they will be happier than they ever were since the rebellion of the first pair, and as happy as it is possible they should be in the present life.—Most sincerely yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR WALTER,—I know that you are too reasonable a man to expect any thing like punctuality of correspondence from a translator of Homer, especially from one who is a doer also of many other things at the same time ; for I labour hard not only to acquire a little fame for myself, but to win it also for others, men of whom I know nothing, not even their names, who send me their poetry, that by translating it out of prose into verse, I may make it more like poetry than it was. Having heard all this, you will feel yourself not only inclined to pardon my long silence, but to pity me also for the cause of it. You may if you please believe likewise, for it is true, that I have a faculty of remembering my friends even when I do not write to them, and of loving them not one jot the less, though I leave them to starve for want of a letter from me. And now I think you have an apology both as to style, matter, and manner, altogether unexceptionable.

Why is the winter like a backbiter? Because Solomon says that a backbiter separates between chief friends, and so does the winter ; to this dirty season it is owing, that I see nothing of the valuable Chesters, whom indeed I see less at all times than serves at all to content me. I hear of them indeed occasionally from my neighbours at the Hall, but even of that comfort I have lately enjoyed less than usual, Mr. Throckmorton having been hindered by his first fit of the gout from his usual visits to Chicheley. The gout however has not prevented his making me a handsome present of a folio edition

of the *Iliad*, published about a year since at Venice, by a *literato*, who calls himself Villoison. It is possible that you have seen it, and that if you have it not yourself, it has at least found its way to Lord Bagot's library. If neither should be the case, when I write next (for sooner or later I shall certainly write to you again if I live), I will send you some pretty stories out of his *Prolegomena*, which will make your hair stand on end, as mine has stood on end already, they so horribly affect, in point of authenticity, the credit of the works of the immortal Homer.

Wishing you and Mrs. Bagot all the happiness that a new year can possibly bring with it, I remain with Mrs. Unwin's best respects, yours, my dear friend, with all sincerity,

W. C.

My paper mourns for the death of Lord Cowper, my valuable cousin, and much my benefactor.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am a terrible creature for not writing sooner, but the old excuse must serve, at least I will not occupy paper with the addition of others unless you should insist on it, in which case I can assure you that I have them ready. Now to business.

From Villoison I learn that it was the avowed opinion and persuasion of Callimachus (whose hymns we both studied at Westminster), that Homer was very imperfectly understood even in his day: that his admirers, deceived by the perspicuity of his style, fancied themselves masters of his meaning, when in truth they knew little about it.

Now we know that Callimachus, as I have hinted, was himself a poet, and a good one; he was also esteemed a good critic: he almost, if not actually, adored Homer, and imitated him as nearly as he could.

What shall we say to this? I will tell you what I say to it. Callimachus meant, and he could mean nothing more by this assertion, than that the poems of Homer were in fact an allegory; that under the obvious import of his stories lay concealed a mystic sense, sometimes philosophical, sometimes religious, sometimes moral,—and that the generality either wanted penetration or industry, or had not been properly qualified by their studies, to discover it. This I can readily believe, for I am myself an ignoramus in these points, and except here and there, discern nothing more than the letter. But if Callimachus will tell me that even of *that* I am ignorant, I hope soon by two great volumes to convince him of the contrary.

I learn also from the same Villoison, that Pisi-stratus, who was a sort of Mæcenas in Athens, where he gave great encouragement to literature, and built and furnished a public library, regretting that there was no complete copy of Homer's works in the world, resolved to make one. For this purpose he advertised rewards in all the newspapers to those, who, being possessed *memoriter* of any part or parcels of the poems of that bard, would resort to his house, and repeat them to his secretaries, that they might write them. Now it happened that more were desirous of the reward than qualified to deserve it. The consequence was that the nonqualified persons having, many of them, a pretty knack at versification,

imposed on the generous Athenian most egregiously, giving him instead of Homer's verses, which they had not to give, verses of their own invention. He, good creature, suspecting no such fraud, took them all for gospel, and entered them into his volume accordingly.

Now let *him* believe the story who can. That Homer's works were in this manner collected, I *can* believe; but that a learned Athenian could be so imposed upon, with sufficient means of detection at hand, I *cannot*. Would he not be on his guard? Would not a difference of style and manner have occurred? Would not that difference have excited a suspicion? Would not that suspicion have led to inquiry? and would not that inquiry have issued in detection? For how easy was it in the multitude of Homer-conners to find two, ten, twenty, possessed of the questionable passage, and by confronting them with the impudent impostor, to convict him. *Abeas ergo in malam rem cum istis tuis hallucinationibus, Villoisone!*
—Faithfully yours, W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, Jan. 3, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have been long silent, but you have had the charity, I hope and believe, not to ascribe my silence to a wrong cause. The truth is I have been too busy to write to any body, having been obliged to give my early mornings to the revisal and correction of a little volume of Hymns for Children, written by I

know not whom. This task I finished but yesterday, and while it was in hand wrote only to my cousin, and to her rarely. From her, however, I knew that you would hear of my well being, which made me less anxious about my debts to you, than I could have been otherwise.

I am almost the only person at Weston, known to you, who have enjoyed tolerable health this winter. In your next letter give us some account of your own state of health, for I have had many anxieties about you. The winter has been mild; but our winters are in general such that when a friend leaves us in the beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps* importing that we have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer.

I am still thrumming Homer's lyre; that is to say, I am still employed in my last revisal; and to give you some idea of the intenseness of my toils, I will inform you that it cost me all the morning yesterday, and all the evening, to translate a single simile to my mind. The transitions from one member of the subject to another, though easy and natural in the Greek, turn out often so intolerably awkward in an English version, that almost endless labour, and no little address, are requisite to give them grace and elegance. I forget if I told you that your German Clavis has been of considerable use to me. I am indebted to it for a right understanding of the manner in which Achilles prepared pork, mutton, and goat's flesh, for the entertainment of his friends, in the night when they came deputed by Agamem-

non to negotiate a reconciliation; a passage of which nobody in the world is perfectly master, myself only and Schauffelbergerus excepted, nor ever was, except when Greek was a *live* language.

I do not know whether my cousin has told you or not how I brag in my letters to her concerning my Translation; perhaps her modesty feels more for me than mine for myself, and she would blush to let even you know the degree of my self-conceit on that subject. I will tell you, however, expressing myself as decently as vanity will permit, that it has undergone such a change for the better in this last revisal, that I have much warmer hopes of success than formerly,—Yours, W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, Jan 4, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM, — Your long silence has occasioned me to have a thousand anxious thoughts about you. So long it has been that whether I now write to a Mrs. King at present on earth, or already in heaven, I know not. I have friends whose silence troubles me less, though I have known them longer; because, if I hear not from themselves, I yet learn from others that they are still living, and likely to live. But if your letters cease to bring me news of your welfare, from whom can I gain the desirable intelligence? The birds of the air will not bring it, and third person there is none between us by whom it might be conveyed. Nothing is plain to me on this

subject, but that either you are dead, or very much indisposed; or, which would affect me with perhaps as deep a concern, though of a different kind, very much offended. The latter of these suppositions I think the least probable, conscious as I am of an habitual desire to offend nobody, especially a lady, and especially a lady to whom I have many obligations. But all the three solutions above-mentioned are very uncomfortable; and if you live, and can send me one that will cause me less pain than either of them, I conjure you, by the charity and benevolence which I know influence you upon all occasions, to communicate it without delay.

It is possible, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, that you are not become perfectly indifferent to me, and to what concerns me. I will therefore add a word or two on a subject which once interested you, and which is, for that reason, worthy to be mentioned, though truly for no other—meaning myself. I am well, and have been so, (uneasiness on your account excepted), both in mind and body, ever since I wrote to you last. I have still the same employment: Homer in the morning, and Homer in the evening, as constant as the day goes round. In the spring I hope to send the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the press. So much for me and my occupations. Poor Mrs. Unwin has hitherto had but an unpleasant winter,—unpleasant as constant pain, either in her head or side, could make it. She joins me in affectionate compliments to yourself and Mr. King, and in earnest wishes that you will soon favour me with a line that shall relieve me

from all my perplexities.—I am, dear Madam,
Sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, Jan. 18, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,—The sincerest thanks attend you, both from Mrs. Unwin and myself, for your many good things, on some of which I have already regaled with an affectionate remembrance of the giver. We have not yet opened the cocoa-nut, but it was particularly welcome. It is medicine to Mrs. Unwin, who finds it always more beneficial to her health than any thing properly called medicinal. We are truly sorry that you are so much a sufferer by the rheumatism. I also occasionally suffer by the same disorder, and in years past was much tormented by it. I can therefore pity you.

The report that informed you of inquiries made by Mrs. Unwin after a house at Huntingdon was unfounded. We have no thought of quitting Weston, unless the same Providence that led us hither should lead us away. It is a situation perfectly agreeable to us both; and to me in particular, who write much and walk much, and consequently love silence and retirement, one of the most eligible. If it has a fault, it is that it seems to threaten us with a certainty of never seeing you. But may we not hope that when a milder season shall have improved your health, we may yet, notwithstanding the distance, be favoured with Mr. King's and your company? A better season will likewise improve the roads, and exactly in proportion as it does so, will, in effect, lessen the interval between us. I know not

if Mr. Martyn be a mathematician, but most probably he is a good one, and he can tell you that this is a proposition mathematically true, though rather paradoxical in appearance.

I am obliged to that gentleman, and *much* obliged to him, for his favourable opinion of my Translation. What parts of Homer are particularly intended by the critics, as those in which I shall probably fall short, I know not; but let me fail where I may, I shall fail nowhere through want of endeavours to avoid it. The under parts of the poems (those I mean which are merely narrative), I find the most difficult. These can only be supported by the diction, and on these, for that reason, I have bestowed the most abundant labour. Fine similes and fine speeches take care of themselves; but the exact process of slaying a sheep and dressing it, it is not so easy to dignify in our language, and in our measure. But I shall have the comfort, as I said, to reflect, that whatever may be hereafter laid to my charge, the sin of idleness will not; justly, at least, it never will. In the mean time, my dear madam, I whisper to you a secret,—not to fall short of the original in every thing, is impossible.

I send you, I believe, all my pieces that you have never seen. Did I not send you *Catharina*? If not, you shall have it hereafter. Mrs. Unwin, whose health is lately somewhat amended, unites with me in affectionate compliments to yourself and Mr. King.—I am, dear Madam, ever, ever in haste,
Sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

Among the relations of Cowper who were proud of their connection with him was Mr. John Johnson

(the son of Catharine, daughter of the Rev. Roger Donne), called by Cowper 'Johnny of Norfolk.' Mr. Johnson paid his first visit to Cowper in January 1790.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 23, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ,—I had a letter yesterday from the wild boy Johnson, for whom I have conceived a great affection. It was just such a letter as I like, of the true helter-skelter kind; and, though he writes a remarkably good hand, scribbled with such rapidity, that it was barely legible. He gave me a droll account of the adventures of Lord Howard's note, and of his own in pursuit of it. The poem he brought me came as from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that I would revise it. It is in the form of a pastoral, and is entitled *The Tale of the Lute*; or, *The Beauties of Audley End*. I read it attentively, was much pleased with part of it, and part of it I equally disliked. I told him so, and in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure. I observed him afterwards somewhat more thoughtful and silent, but occasionally as pleasant as usual; and in Kilwick wood, where we walked the next day, the truth came out; that he was himself the author; and that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and several friends of his own age, to whom he had shown it, differing from his lordship in opinion, and being highly pleased with it, he had come at last to a resolution to abide by my judgment; a measure to which Lord Howard by all

means advised him. He accordingly brought it, and will bring it again in the summer, when we shall lay our heads together and try to mend it.

I have lately had a letter also from Mrs. King, to whom I had written to inquire whether she were living or dead. She tells me the critics expect from my Homer every thing in some parts, and that in others I shall fall short. These are the Cambridge critics; and she has her intelligence from the botanical professor, Martyn. That gentleman in reply answers them, that I shall fall short in nothing, but shall disappoint them all. It shall be my endeavour to do so, and I am not without hope of succeeding.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 26, 1790.

MY blunder in thanking thee, my dearest coz, for a basket instead of a box, seems to have had something prophetic in it; for in the evening a basket sent from you, and filled with excellent fishes, actually arrived: with some of them we have compensated our neighbours for pigs presented to us in times past, and on the remainder we have chiefly subsisted ever since, nor is our stock even now exhausted. Many thanks are due to thee for this supply, and we pay them with much sincerity.

Could I blunder as I did in the instance of my Norfolk cousin, always, I mean, with such ludicrous consequences, I should be tempted to do it daily. I have not laughed so much many a long day as at your and his droll account of the strange and unimaginable distresses that ensued on the mere

omission of those two important syllables that compose the name of Johnson.

It gives me great pleasure that you are so much pleased with him, because I was much pleased with him myself. There is a simplicity in his character that charms me, and the more because it is so great a rarity. Humour he certainly has, and of the most agreeable kind. His letter to you proves it, and so does his poem; and that he has many other talents which, at present, his shyness too much suppresses, I doubt not. He has a countenance which, with all the sweetness of temper that it expresses, expresses also a mind much given to reflection, and an understanding that in due time will know how to show itself to advantage.

An indisposition from which Mrs. Frog was not sufficiently recovered to see company, and especially a stranger, was the reason of our not being invited while he was with me. She is now, however, perfectly restored; I dined there the day after he went, and dine there again to-morrow.

The young man begged that he might carry away with him eight or ten books of Homer, which he would transcribe for me, he said, at Cambridge; but I feared to trust them in that pestilent place, where some of his wild young *Trigrymates* might have snatched them from him, and have done with them I know not what.

I wish you to read *Adriano; or, the First of June*,¹

¹ James Hurdis (1763-1801) wrote his *Village Curate* in 1785, his *Adriano* followed. Hurdis was curate of Burwash in Sussex—since associated with the name of Mr. Rudyard Kipling—for six years. In 1791 he became Vicar of Bishopstone. Here he wrote *The Tragedy of Sir Thomas More* and *The Favourite Village*. Mr. W. R. Morfill (in the *Dictionary of National Biography*) calls him 'a poor copy of Cowper.'

and tell me what you think of it. Johnson has sent it to me for my opinion, and I must return it soon. It is rather a thin octavo, and will not occupy much of thy time.

Our friends at the Hall are all pretty well at present; but the lord of the mansion has not perfectly recovered his foot again. Mrs. Unwin still has her fever, which chiefly attacks her in the night. Beau is well, as are the two cats, and the three birds, whose cages I am going to clean, and all send their love to you.—Yours, my dear, WM. C.

A bank note will be most commodious, and we have no fears about its safe arrival. Johnson, I believe, is tolerably well incomed. I asked him if he depended on his success in the church for a maintenance; and he answered,—No.

A rod is preparing for Miss Birch; and when Enfield's *Speaker* appears she will feel it.

'Tis hardly fair, Miss Birch, that you
Should steal our hearts and poems too.

I am glad that the General dealt so kindly by your *protégé*; he has dealt kindly too by me, having sent me a whole ream of paper.

Here endeth my postscript.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

Weston Underwood, Feb. 1, 1790.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,—I shot a few lines after you to Holyhead, according to your desire, and considering the distance of the place from London, I think is possible that you might find them there,

though your letter did not reach me till the second day after your departure. But lest it should have happened otherwise, I take your letter first from an unanswered heap to tell you again what I told you there,—that I am very sensible of your kindness, and, considering our long separation, am sensible of it the more. Thou art the only one of all my Temple connections who has, or seems to have, adverted to me since I left them seven and twenty years ago. From many others I have received numerous acts of kindness, but none from them.

I told you also in that note that I would in due time take you roundly to task for being so long silent, and for not giving me a day or two of your company while you were in England. The latter perhaps you could not, and if you could not I am so merciful that I will excuse you, much as I should have been gratified by a sight of you: but how you will make me amends for not visiting me once in a year and a half by letter, I am not able to conceive, unless by writing more frequently in future.

Alston's¹ connection with the Chancellor has been to him both honourable and useful, and I am glad of it. I have applied, and application has been made for me, to the same source of honour and profit, but in vain. I am indeed a man not easily served, being fit for nothing in the world but to write verses, which I do without intermission, and shall probably while I can hold a pen. But it is late in the day, and every day the motives by which men are urged to distinguish themselves, with me grow weaker. The *monumentum ære perennius* is of difficult acquisition, and, in fact, of no worth

¹ Alston, a Templar friend of Cowper's.

to him whose name it perpetuates. But write I must, because idleness is misery; and not to write my best would be absurd, because though posthumous fame will do me no good, I could not well bear while I lived to be called a blockhead.

This brings me naturally to answer your inquiries concerning Homer. Homer then, I hope, will go to press in the spring,—in April, perhaps, or in May. I have finished the *Odyssey* pretty much to my mind, and fourteen books of the *Iliad*. When the *Iliad* has had the revisal which I am now giving it, I shall give the whole one more, in which I shall find but little to do, and then throw myself into the hands of the public. On the sum of the matter, I think it probable, nay certain, that the two volumes will come out next winter.

And now, my friend, adieu! Homer calls. I rejoice that your family are well, and love them for your sake. Let me hear from you at some idle hour, if you have any such, and believe me affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, Feb. 2, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Should Heyne's¹ Homer appear before mine, which I hope is not probable, and should he adopt in it the opinion of Bentley, that the whole last *Odyssey* is spurious, I will dare to contradict both him and the Doctor. I am only in part of Bentley's mind, (if indeed

¹ Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), a professor at Göttingen. His edition of Homer's *Iliad* appeared in 1802. There is a very eloquent paper on Heyne by Carlyle in the *Miscellanies*.

his mind were such,) in this matter; and giant as he was in learning, and eagle-eyed in criticism, am persuaded, convinced, and sure, (can I be more positive?) that except from the moment when the Ithacans begin to meditate an attack on the cottage of Laertes, and thence to the end, that book is the work of Homer. From the moment aforesaid, I yield the point, or rather have never, since I had any skill in Homer, felt myself at all inclined to dispute it. But I believe perfectly at the same time that, Homer himself alone excepted, the Greek poet never existed who could have written the speeches made by the shade of Agamemnon, in which there is more insight into the heart discovered than I ever saw in any other work, unless in Shakespeare's. I am equally disposed to fight for the whole passage that describes Laertes, and the interview between him and Ulysses. Let Bentley grant these to Homer, and I will shake hands with him as to all the rest. The battle with which the book concludes is, I think, a paltry battle, and there is a huddle in the management of it altogether unworthy of my favourite, and the favourite of all ages.

If you should happen to fall into company with Dr. Warton again, you will not, I dare say, forget to make him my respectful compliments, and to assure him that I felt myself not a little flattered by the favourable mention he was pleased to make of me and my labours. The poet who pleases a man like him has nothing left to wish for. I am glad that you were pleased with my young cousin Johnson; he is a boy, and bashful, but has great merit in respect both of character and intellect. So far, at

least, as in a week's knowledge of him I could possibly learn; he is very amiable, and very sensible, and inspired me with a warm wish to know him better.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Feb. 5, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your kind letter deserved a speedier answer, but you know my excuse, which were I to repeat always, my letters would resemble the fag-end of a newspaper, where we always find the price of stocks, detailed with little or no variation.

When January returns, you have your feelings concerning me, and such as prove the faithfulness of your friendship. I have mine also concerning myself, but they are of a cast different from yours. Yours have a mixture of sympathy and tender solicitude, which makes them, perhaps, not altogether unpleasant. Mine, on the contrary, are of an unmixed nature, and consist simply, and merely, of the most alarming apprehensions. Twice has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man. I accordingly look forward to it, and meet it, with a dread not to be imagined.¹ I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it; but it is natural, I believe,

¹ January being the month of his terrible dream. See vol. i. p. 133: 'In this month the distemper has twice seized me.'—Letter of 4th January 1791.

and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes, in any of His operations, and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents, in His hand, which strike only when He bids them. I know consequently that one month is as dangerous to me as another, and that in the middle of summer, at noon-day, and in the clear sunshine, I am, in reality, unless guarded by Him, as much exposed, as when fast asleep at midnight, and in mid-winter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe, (with my own, however, I am sure it is so), is liable to similar periodical affection. But February is come; January, my terror, is passed; and some shades of the gloom that attended his presence, have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, till they turn yellow I will make myself easy. The year *will* go round, and January *will* approach. I *shall* tremble again, and I know it; but in the meantime I will be as comfortable as I can. Thus, in respect of peace of mind, such as it is that I enjoy, I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth; and, of a Christian, such as you once knew me, am, by a strange transformation, become an Epicurean philosopher, bearing this motto on my mind,—*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quærere.*

I have run on in a strain that the beginning of your letter suggested to me, with such impetuosity, that I have not left myself opportunity to write more by the present post: and being unwilling that you should wait longer for what will be worth nothing when you 'get it, will only express the great pleasure we feel on hearing, as we did lately from Mr. Bull, that Mrs. Newton is so much better.

Mrs. Unwin has been very indifferent all the winter, harassed by continual headaches and want of sleep, the consequences of a nervous fever: but I hope she begins to recover.

With our best love to Mrs. Newton, not forgetting Miss Catlett.—I remain, my dear friend,
Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 9, 1790.

I HAVE sent you lately scraps instead of letters, having had occasion to answer immediately on the receipt, which always happens while I am *deep in Homer*.

I knew when I recommended Johnson to you that you would find some way to serve him, and so it has happened, for notwithstanding your own apprehensions to the contrary, you have already procured him a chaplainship. This is pretty well, considering that it is an early day, and that you have but just begun to know that there is such a man under heaven. I had rather myself be patronised by a person of small interest, with a

heart like yours, than by the Chancellor himself, if he did not care a farthing for me.

If I did not desire you to make my acknowledgments to Anonymous,¹ as I believe I did not, it was because I am not aware that I am warranted to do so. But the omission is of less consequence, because whoever he is, though he has no objection to doing the kindest things, he seems to have an aversion to the thanks they merit.

You must know that two odes composed by Horace have lately been discovered at Rome;² I wanted them transcribed into the blank leaves of a little Horace of mine, and Mrs. Throckmorton performed that service for me; in a blank leaf therefore of the same book I wrote the following.³

W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON (BOOKSELLER)

Weston, Feb. 11, 1790.

DEAR SIR,—I am very sensibly obliged by the remarks of Mr. Fuseli, and beg that you will tell him so: they afford me opportunities of improvement, which I shall not neglect. When he shall see the press-copy, he will be convinced of this; and will be convinced likewise that smart as he sometimes is, he spares me often when I have no mercy on myself. He will see almost a new translation. I assure you faithfully, that whatever my faults may be, to be easily or hastily satisfied with what I have written is not one of them.

¹ Theodora Cowper.

² They were spurious.

³ Verses to Mrs. Throckmorton on her transcript of one of them. Globe Ed. p. 373.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 26, 1790.

You have set my heart at ease, my cousin, so far as you were yourself the object of its anxieties. What other troubles it feels can be cured by God alone. But you are never silent a week longer than usual, without giving an opportunity to my imagination (ever fruitful in flowers of a sable hue), to tease me with them day and night. London is indeed a pestilent place, as you call it, and I would, with all my heart, that thou hadst less to do with it; were you under the same roof with me, I should know you to be safe, and should never distress you with melancholy letters.

I feel myself well enough inclined to the measure you propose, and will show to your new acquaintance¹ with all my heart a sample of my translation, but it shall not, if you please, be taken from the *Odyssey*. It is a poem of a gentler character than the *Iliad*, and as I propose to carry her by a *coup de main*, I shall employ Achilles, Agamemnon, and the two armies of Greece and Troy in my service. I will accordingly send you in the box that I received from you last night the two first books of the *Iliad*, for that lady's perusal; to those I have given a third revisal; for them therefore I will be answerable, and am not afraid to stake the credit of my work upon *them* with her, or with any living wight, especially one who understands the original. I do not mean that even they are finished, for I shall examine and cross-examine them yet

¹ Mrs. Montagu. See vol. iii. p. 266.

again, and so you may tell her, but I know that they will not disgrace me; whereas it is so long since I have looked at the *Odyssey*, that I know nothing at all about it. They shall set sail from Olney on Monday morning in the *Diligence*, and will reach you, I hope, in the evening. As soon as she has done with them, I shall be glad to have them again, for the time draws near when I shall want to give them the last touch.

I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's¹ kindness, in giving me the only picture² of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated. I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Everybody loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, everybody was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books entrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man; he has some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture.

W. C.

¹ Cowper's cousin Anne, daughter of the Rev. Roger Donne. Cowper called her 'Rose.'

² It was this gift that led Cowper to write the beautiful lines *On the receipt of my Mother's Picture out of Norfolk*.

TO MRS. BODHAM

Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

MY DEAREST ROSE,—Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the

days of my childhood much to resemble my mother; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability; and a little, I would hope, both of his and her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's,¹ and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge; and that, breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask

¹ Rev. John Donne (1573-1631), divine, poet, and wit—'the great dean.' See letter of 31 July 1790, also the Sonnet *Kinsman Beloved*—in which Johnson is exhorted, 'like our forefather Donne,' to

'Seek heavenly wealth, and work for God alone.'

you all together, for want of house-room ; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt,¹ Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me ; she was my play-fellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so ! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield,² and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am, my dear, dear Rose, ever yours,
W. C.

P.S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres,³ whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P.S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your

¹ Elizabeth Donne married Thomas Hewitt.

Anne Donne married the Rev. Thomas Bodham.

Harriet Donne married Richard Balls.

Catherine Donne married John Johnson.

² Catfield, among the Norfolk Broads.

³ Vicar of Loddon ; died 1789.

nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, Feb. 28, 1790.

MY DEAR COUSIN JOHN,—I have much wished to hear from you, and though you are welcome to write to Mrs. Unwin as often as you please, I wish myself to be numbered among your correspondents.

I shall find time to answer you, doubt it not! Be as busy as we may, we can always find time to do what is agreeable to us. By the way, had you a letter from Mrs. Unwin? I am witness that she addressed one to you before you went into Norfolk; but your mathematico-poetical head forgot to acknowledge the receipt of it.

I was never more pleased in my life than to learn, and to learn from herself, that my dearest Rose¹ is still alive. Had she not engaged me to love her by the sweetness of her character when a child, she would have done it effectually now, by making me the most acceptable present in the world, my own dear mother's picture. I am perhaps the only person living who remembers her; but I remember her well, and can attest on my own knowledge the truth of the resemblance. Amiable and elegant

¹ Mrs. Anne Bodham.

as the countenance is, such exactly was her own; she was one of the tenderest parents, and so just a copy of her is therefore to me invaluable.

I wrote yesterday to my Rose, to tell her all this, and to thank her for her kindness in sending it. Neither do I forget your kindness, who intimated to her that I should be happy to possess it.

She invites me into Norfolk; but, alas, she might as well invite the house in which I dwell; for, all other considerations and impediments apart, how is it possible that a translator of Homer should lumber to such a distance? But though I cannot comply with her kind invitation, I have made myself the best amends in my power by inviting her, and all the family of Donnes, to Weston. Perhaps we could not accommodate them all at once, but in succession we could; and can at any time find room for five, three of them being females, and one a married one. You are a mathematician; tell me, then, how five persons can be lodged in three beds, (two males and three females), and I shall have good hope, that you will proceed a senior optime? It would make me happy to see our house so furnished. As to yourself, whom I know to be a *subscalarian*, or a man that sleeps under the stairs,¹ I should have no objection at all, neither could you possibly have any yourself, to the garret, as a place in which you might be disposed of with great felicity of accommodation.

I thank you much for your services in the transcribing way, and would by no means have you despair of an opportunity to serve me in the same

¹ Alluding to the situation of Johnson's rooms at Caius College, Cambridge.

way yet again. Write to me soon and tell me when I shall see you.

I have not said the half that I have to say, but breakfast is at hand, which always terminates my epistles.

What have you done with your poem? The trimming that it procured you here has not, I hope, put you out of conceit with it entirely; you are more than equal to the alteration that it needs. Only remember, that in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle: the want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it. So now adieu for the present. Beware of killing yourself with problems; for if you do, you will never live to be another Sir Isaac.

Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances attend you; Lady Hesketh is much disposed to love you; perhaps most who know you have some little tendency the same way.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 8, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I thank thee much, and oft, for negotiating so well this poetical concern with Mrs. —, and for sending me her opinion in her own hand. I should be unreasonable indeed not to be highly gratified by it, and I like it the better for being modestly expressed. It is, as you know, and it shall be some months longer, my daily business to polish and improve what is done, that when the whole shall appear she may find her

expectations answered. I am glad also that thou didst send her the sixteenth *Odyssey*, though, as I said before, I know not at all at present whereof it is made : but I am sure thou wouldst not have sent it, hadst thou not conceived a good opinion of it thyself, and thought that it would do me credit. It was very kind in thee to sacrifice to this Minerva on my account.

For my sentiments on the subject of the Test Act, I cannot do better than refer thee to my poem, entitled and called, 'Expostulation.' I have there expressed myself not much in its favour,—considering it in a religious view ; and in a political one, I like it not a jot better. I am neither Tory nor High Churchman, but an old Whig, as my father was before me ; and an enemy consequently to all tyrannical impositions.

Mrs. Unwin bids me return thee many thanks for thy inquiries so kindly made concerning her health. She is a little better than of late, but has been ill continually ever since last November. Every thing that could try patience and submission she has had, and her submission and patience have answered in the trial, though mine on her account have often failed sadly.

I have a letter from Johnson, who tells me that he has sent his transcript to you, begging at the same time more copy. Let him have it by all means ; he is an industrious youth, and I love him dearly. I told him that you are disposed to love him a little. A new poem is born on the receipt of my mother's picture. Thou shalt have it.

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, March 11, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was glad to hear from you, for a line from you gives me always much pleasure, but was not much gladdened by the contents of your letter. The state of your health, which I have learned more accurately perhaps from my cousin, except in this last instance, than from yourself, has rather alarmed me, and even she has collected her information upon that subject more from your looks, than from your own acknowledgments. To a person indifferent to her or to whom she bears a dislike, she is all smiles on all occasions, but not such always to those whom she loves and values. Them, if she feels herself inclined to scratch, she scratches without ceremony, and this is the manner of all the ladies I ever knew, and I question if you ever will meet with an exception. To complain much and often of our indispositions does not always ensure the pity of the hearer, perhaps sometimes forfeits it; but to dissemble them altogether, or at least to suppress the worst, is attended ultimately with an inconvenience greater still; the secret will out at last, and our friends, unprepared to receive it, are doubly distressed about us. In saying this I squint a little at Mrs. Unwin, who will read it; it is with her, as with you, the only subject on which she practises any dissimulation at all; the consequence is, that when she is much indisposed I never believe myself in possession of the whole truth, live in constant expectation of hearing something worse, and at the long run am seldom disappointed. It

seems therefore, as on all other occasions, so even in this, the better course on the whole to appear what we are; not to lay the fears of our friends asleep by cheerful looks, which do not properly belong to us, or by letters written as if we were well, when in fact we are very much otherwise. On condition however that you act differently toward me for the future, I will pardon the past; and she may gather, from my clemency shown to you, some hopes, on the same conditions, of similar clemency to herself.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, March 12, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I live in such a nook, have so few opportunities of hearing news, and so little time to read it, that to me, to begin a letter seems always a sort of forlorn hope. Can it be possible, I say to myself, that I should have any thing to communicate? These misgivings have an ill effect, so far as my punctuality is concerned, and are apt to deter me from the business of letter-writing, as from an enterprise altogether impracticable.

I will not say that you are more pleased with my trifles than they deserve, lest I should seem to call your judgment in question; but I suspect that a little partiality to the brother of my brother enters into the opinion you form of them. No matter, however, by what you are influenced, it is for my interest that you should like them at any rate, because, such as they are, they are the only return I can make you for all your kindness. This consideration will have two effects; it will have a tendency to

make me more industrious in the production of such pieces, and more attentive to the manner in which I write them. This reminds me of a piece in your possession, which I will entreat you to commit to the flames, because I am somewhat ashamed of it. To make you amends, I hereby promise to send you a new edition of it when time shall serve, delivered from the passages that I dislike in the first, and in other respects amended. The piece that I mean, is one entitled—‘To Lady Hesketh on her furnishing for me our house at Weston’¹—or, as the lawyers say, words to that amount. I have, likewise, since I sent you the last packet, been delivered of two or three other brats, and, as the year proceeds, shall probably add to the number. All that come shall be basketed in time, and conveyed to your door.

I have lately received from a female cousin of mine in Norfolk, whom I have not seen these thirty years, a picture of my own mother. She died when I wanted two days of being six years old; yet I remember her perfectly, find the picture a strong likeness of her, and because her memory has been ever precious to me, have written a poem on the receipt of it: a poem which, one excepted, I had more pleasure in writing than any that I ever wrote. That one was addressed to a lady whom I expect in a few minutes to come down to breakfast, and who has supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother, these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers² is not common.

¹ *Gratitude*, Globe Edition, p. 357.

² Cowper’s ‘three mothers’ were (1) His own mother; (2) Mrs. Rebecca Cowper, his step-mother; (3) Mrs. Unwin. See April 19, 1790.

Adieu, my dear Madam ; be assured that I always think of you with much esteem and affection, and am, with mine and Mrs. Unwin's best compliments to you and yours, most unfeignedly your friend and humble servant,
W. C.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON, ALIAS MY DEAR MRS. FROG

The Lodge, March 21, 1790.

MY DEAREST MADAM,—This comes to let you know that yours per post yesterday came safe to hand and found all well, as we hope you are at this present. I shall only observe on the subject of your absence that you have stretched it since you went, and have made it a week longer. Weston is sadly *unked*¹ without you ; and here are two of us, who will be heartily glad to see you again. I believe you are happier at home than any where, which is a comfortable belief to your neighbours, because it affords assurance that since you are neither likely to ramble for pleasure, nor to meet with any avocations of business, while Weston shall continue to be your home, it will not often want you.

The two first books of my *Iliad* have been submitted to the inspection and scrutiny of a great critic of your sex,² at the instance of my cousin, as you may suppose. The lady is mistress of more tongues than a few (it is to be hoped she is single), and particularly she is mistress of the Greek. She returned them with expressions that if any thing could make a poet prouder than all poets naturally are, would have made me so. I tell you this, because

¹ A Buckinghamshire word (two syllables), meaning 'wretched,' 'miserable.'

² Mrs. Montagu.

I know that you all interest yourselves in the success of the said *Iliad*.

My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault: which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has however undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years younger than you have ever seen me.

I have produced another poem, which awaits your return. It is in a style very different from the last, not merry but sad, at least serious. The subject of it is my own mother's picture, which I told you I had lately received out of Norfolk. She was the delight of my heart during the six first years of my life, and then she died; but I have a perfect remembrance of her and of all her kindness.

I am glad on more accounts than one that your bill is not likely to come on this year. In the first place, it will not call you to London, and in the next, it will be introduced with more probability of success when the present heat shall have somewhat abated. That our present episcopacy should carry things with so high a hand, and that you should pay double price for living in your own country, are two grievances that I cannot bear.

Remember me affectionately to Mr. Frog, and to your brother George, whose absence I shall sincerely regret as well as you, for he is *jucundissimus omnium sodalium quot sunt vel fuerunt vel post hoc aliis erunt in annis*, and where there are but two men of that disposition in a whole neighbourhood it is not pleasant to dispense with one of them.—I am, my

dear Mrs. Frog, with Mrs. Unwin's best remembrances, ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

I heard of your birthday very early in the morning; the news came from the steeple.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 22, 1790.

I REJOICE, my dearest cousin, that my MSS. have roamed the earth so successfully, and have met with no disaster. The single book excepted that went to the bottom of the Thames and rose again, they have been fortunate without exception. I am not superstitious, but have nevertheless as good a right to believe that adventure an omen, and a favourable one, as Swift had to interpret, as he did, the loss of a fine fish, which he had no sooner laid on the bank, than it flounced into the water again. This he tells us himself he always considered as a type of his future disappointments: and why may not I as well consider the marvellous recovery of my lost book from the bottom of the Thames, as typical of its future prosperity? To say the truth, I have no fears now about the success of my Translation, though in time past I have had many. I knew there was a style somewhere, could I but find it, in which Homer ought to be rendered, and which alone would suit him. Long time I blundered about it, ere I could attain to any decided judgment on the matter; at first I was betrayed, by a desire of accommodating my language to the simplicity of his, into much of the quaintness that belonged to our writers of the fifteenth century. In the course

of many revisals I have delivered myself from this evil, I believe, entirely ; but I have done it slowly, and as a man separates himself from his mistress when he is going to marry. I had so strong a predilection in favour of this style at first, that I was crazed to find that others were not as much enamoured with it as myself. At every passage of that sort which I obliterated, I groaned bitterly, and said to myself, I am spoiling my work to please those who have no taste for the simple graces of antiquity. But in measure, as I adopted a more modern phraseology, I became a convert to their opinion, and in the last revisal, which I am now making, am not sensible of having spared a single expression of the obsolete kind. I see my work so much improved by this alteration, that I am filled with wonder at my own backwardness to assent to the necessity of it, and the more when I consider that Milton, with whose manner I account myself intimately acquainted, is never quaint, never twangs through the nose, but is every where grand and elegant, without resorting to musty antiquity for his beauties. On the contrary, he took a long stride forward, left the language of his own day far behind him, and anticipated the expressions of a century yet to come.

I have now, as I said, no longer any doubt of the event, but I will give thee a shilling if thou wilt tell me what I shall say in my Preface. It is an affair of much delicacy, and I have as many opinions about it as there are whims in a weathercock.

Send my mss. and thine when thou wilt. In a day or two I shall enter on the last *Iliad*. When I have finished it I shall give the *Odysey* one more

reading, and shall therefore shortly have occasion for the copy in thy possession ; but you see that there is no need to hurry.

I leave the little space for Mrs. Unwin's use, who means, I believe, to occupy it, and am evermore thine most truly,

W. C.

Postscript in the hand of Mrs. Unwin.

You cannot imagine how much your ladyship would oblige your unworthy servant, if you would be so good to let me know in what point I differ from you. All that at present I can say is, that I will readily sacrifice my own opinion, unless I can give you a substantial reason for adhering to it.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, March 23, 1790.

YOUR MSS. arrived safe in New Norfolk Street, and I am much obliged to you for your labours. Were you now at Weston I could furnish you with employment for some weeks, and shall perhaps be equally able to do it in summer, for I have lost my best amanuensis in this place, Mr. George Throckmorton, who is gone to Bath.

You are a man to be envied, who have never read the *Odyssey*, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has insinuated to the contrary. His comparison of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the meridian, and to the declining sun, is pretty, but, I am persuaded, not just. The prettiness of it seduced him ; he was otherwise too

judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age; on the contrary, it seems [to me a certainty, that Homer, had he written the *Odyssey* in his youth, could not have written it better: and if the *Iliad* in his old age, that he would have written it just as well. A critic would tell me, that instead of *written*, I should have said *composed*. Very likely;—but I am not writing to one of that snarling generation.

My boy, I long to see thee again. It has happened some way or other, that Mrs. Unwin and I have conceived a great affection for thee. That I should, is the less to be wondered at (because thou art a shred of my own mother); neither is the wonder great that she should fall into the same predicament; for she loves everything that I love. You will observe that your own personal right to be beloved makes no part of the consideration. There is nothing that I touch with so much tenderness as the vanity of a young man, because I know how extremely susceptible he is of impressions that might hurt him in that particular part of his composition. If you should ever prove a coxcomb, from which character you stand just now at a greater distance than any young man I know, it shall never be said that I have made you one; no, you will gain nothing by me but the honour of being much valued by a poor poet, who can do you no good while he lives, and has nothing to leave you when he dies. If you can be contented to be dear to me on these conditions, so you shall; but other terms more advantageous than these, or more inviting, none have I to propose.

Farewell. Puzzle not yourself about a subject when you write to either of us; every thing is subject enough from those we love. W. C.

TO THE REV. ROWLAND HILL

Weston Underwood, March 29, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,—The moment when you ceased to be *incog*. I ought to have written you at least a few lines of apology for the liberties I had taken with your hymns,¹ but being extremely busy at that time, and hoping that you would be so charitable as to pardon the omission, I desired Mr. Bull to be my proxy, charging him to make my excuses, and to assure you that I was perfectly satisfied with your making any alterations that you might see to be necessary in my text. If anything fell from my pen that seemed to countenance the heresy of *universal redemption*, you did well to displace it, for it contradicted the Scripture, and belied me.

I am much obliged to you for the little volumes which I received safe on Saturday; and because I suppose that your end will be best answered by dispersion, if I should have occasion for half a dozen more, will order them from your bookseller without scruple.

I am, my dear Sir, with much respect, and with Mrs. Unwin's compliments, your affectionate humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

¹ Rowland Hill (1744-1833), the popular preacher of Surrey Chapel, South London. In 1810 he published *Village Dialogues*. Mr. Hill was issuing a Hymn Book. A few days later he writes to Bull, 'at last the famous publication is out—Cowper, Bull, Hill & Co. . . . Mr. Cowper will find almost all his judicious amendments strictly adhered to.' Mr. Hill sent Cowper six copies.

Should you want me on any similar occasion hereafter, I am always at your disposal.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, April 17, 1790.

YOUR letter that now lies before me is almost three weeks old, and therefore of full age to receive an answer, which it shall have without delay, if the interval between the present moment and that of breakfast should prove sufficient for the purpose.

Yours to Mrs. Unwin was received yesterday, for which she will thank you in due time. I have also seen, and have now in my desk, your letter to Lady Hesketh; she sent it thinking that it would divert me; in which she was not mistaken. I shall tell her when I write to her next, that you long to receive a line from her. Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript; it was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself; an effect which it did not fail to produce;—and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask, how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable: but in general a man who reaches my years finds

That long experience does attain
To something like prophetic strain.

I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and

persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us. Yours gave me a favourable impression of you the moment I beheld it, and though I shall not tell you in particular what I saw in it, for reasons mentioned in my last, I will add that I have observed in you nothing since that has not confirmed the opinion I then formed in your favour. In fact, I cannot recollect that my skill in physiognomy has ever deceived me, and I should add more on this subject had I room.

When you have shut up your mathematical books, you must give yourself to the study of Greek; not merely that you may be able to read Homer and the other Greek classics with ease, but the Greek Testament, and the Greek fathers also. Thus qualified, and by the aid of your fiddle into the bargain, together with some portion of the grace of God (without which nothing can be done), to enable you to look well to your flock, when you shall get one, you will be well set up for a parson. In which character, if I live to see you in it, I shall expect and hope that you will make a very different figure from most of your fraternity.—Ever yours,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, April 19, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ,—I thank thee for my cousin Johnson's letter, which diverted me. I had one from him lately, in which he expressed an ardent

desire of a line from you, and the delight he would feel in receiving it. I know not whether you will have the charity to satisfy his longings, but mention the matter, thinking it possible that you may. A letter from a lady to a youth immersed in mathematics must be singularly pleasant.

I am finishing Homer backward, having begun at the last book, and designing to persevere in that crab-like fashion, till I arrive at the first. This may remind you perhaps of a certain poet's Prisoner in the Bastille (thank Heaven! in the Bastille now no more),¹ counting the nails in the door for variety's sake in all directions. I find so little to do in the last revisal, that I shall soon reach the *Odyssey*, and soon want those books of it which are in thy possession; but the two first of the *Iliad*, which are also in thy possession, much sooner; thou mayest therefore send them by the first fair opportunity. I am in high spirits on this subject, and think that I have at last licked the clumsy cub into a shape that will secure to it the favourable notice of the public. Let not — retard me, and I shall hope to get it out next winter.

I am glad that thou hast sent the General those verses on my mother's picture. They will amuse him,—only I hope that he will not miss my mother-in-law,² and think that she ought to have made a third. On such an occasion it was not possible to mention her with any propriety. I rejoice at the General's recovery;—may it prove a perfect one!

W. C.

¹ Fall of the Bastille, 14th July 1789.

² Cowper of course refers to his step-mother, Rebecca Cowper, his father's second wife.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, April 30, 1790.

To my old friend, Dr. Madan, thou couldst not have spoken better than thou didst. Tell him, I beseech you, that I have not forgotten him: tell him also that to my heart and home he will be always welcome; nor he only, but all that are his. His judgment of my Translation gave me the highest satisfaction, because I know him to be a rare old Grecian.

The General's approbation of my picture verses gave me also much pleasure. I wrote them not without tears, therefore I presume it may be that they are felt by others. Should he offer me my father's picture, I shall gladly accept it. A melancholy pleasure is better than none,—nay verily, better than most. He had a sad task imposed on him, but no man could acquit himself of such a one with more discretion, or with more tenderness. The death of the unfortunate young man reminded me of those lines in *Lycidas*,

‘It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine!—’

How beautiful!

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

May 2, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am still at the old sport—Homer all the morning, and Homer all the evening. Thus have I been held in constant employment, I know not exactly how many, but I believe these

six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour, that I shall, no doubt, continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with; but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret.

My very best compliments attend Mrs. Hill, whom I love, unsight unseen, as they say; but yet truly.—Yours ever, W.M. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

May 2 (1790), Sunday, 2 o'clock.

MY DEAREST COZ.—I send this in answer to yours just received, by express to Newport, to prevent if possible thy sending us any salmon at the enormous price you mention. We shall not in the meantime die for want of fish, my friend Sephus¹ having lately sent two baskets of mackerel, on the last of which we dine to-day, and Griggy² dines with us on a turkey to-morrow. Therefore send no salmon, unless you wish us both to be choked, till it comes down to a price that one may swallow with safety.

Our hearts jumped for joy at the Guardian's escape, of which the papers informed us, and we still sympathise with all parties concerned.

I shall be happy also if thou hast been able to acquaint my dear friend Spencer, either by means

¹ Mr. Joseph Hill.

² Dr. Gregson, the priest.

of his son, or by *personal intercourse* or otherwise, with the joy that it will give me to see him here, and his reverend offspring with him. I shall not be altogether hopeless that he will call perhaps in his way downward.—Yours, with the celerity of lightning,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

The Lodge, May 10, 1790.

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,—You have by this time, I presume, heard from the Doctor,¹ whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin (I do not mean a hedgehog, commonly called an urchin in old times, but a boy, commonly so called at present), expecting that he would find you at Bucklands,² whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others with letters, or at least with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his despatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended), is the more probable, because he was never four miles from his home before, having only travelled at the side of a plough-team; and when the Doctor gave him his direction to Bucklands, he asked, very naturally, if that place was

¹ Dr. Gregson, the priest.

² The Berkshire residence of the Throckmortons.

in England. So what has become of him Heaven knows!

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, viz. Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes—for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also), informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields, I do not sally like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found; but am a peaceable poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm,—the foxhunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike Bill is alive or dead;—so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramus surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you, and Mr. Frog; that I long for your return, and that I am with Mrs. Unwin's best affections,—Ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

May 11, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ,—We have of late exchanged despatches with such frequency and nimbleness of

finger, that it began to be necessary we should allow ourselves time to breathe. It is well for us both that we spend much of our life with a pen in our hand, else I know not when we should have recovered the effects of such severe exercise.

Your news of Martin's¹ death reached me in one of my melancholy moods, and I reflected on it and felt it accordingly. What he was in reality, God only knows. That he once seemed to have grace is certain, and that no man had a mind more evangelically enlightened is equally so. The Giver of grace and light, and He only, knows how to make allowance for the unavoidable effects of situation in life, constitution, and errors in judgment, and those occurrences which give an unavoidable warp to the conduct. If by His providence He places one of His own people under the influence of any or all these possible causes of declension in spirituality of heart and mind, He will consider it, and to Him, as you observe, the delinquent must be left. He has saved, I doubt not, thousands who in man's account have perished, and has left many to perish whom their survivors have been ready to canonize. Of Martin, therefore, in his present state, I will hope the best, judging and condemning not him, but his abominable and foolish book,² which, for the sake of his connections, I wish he had never written. The book, indeed, is pretty much forgotten, but it will never be forgotten that polygamy has been defended and recommended in a Christian land, and by a minister of the Gospel, and that his

¹ Rev. Martin Madan.

² *Thelyphthora ; or a Treatise on Marriage*. See the Letters of 1781.

name was Madan. When you shall have learned how he disposed of the much that he left, you will gratify my curiosity by informing me.

The Frogs made their transit from Chillington¹ to Bucklands on Sunday last, and will come home again the last week of the month. From her I have had a letter, which I answered yesterday. George is to join them here at their return, and then the village will seem peopled again.

Poor Beau has been much indisposed these two days, and I have sent him this morning to Gayhurst to consult the huntsman. What ails him, or what is the cause of his ail, I know not; but he is ever gulping, as if swallowing somewhat that would hardly pass, or retching, or coughing,—yet is his vivacity not in the least abated.

I have not heard lately from Johnson the Cantab, but wonder much more that I have had no answer from the Norfolk Rose,² to whom I wrote immediately on the receipt of her letter, sending her a loving and pressing invitation to Weston. The only news of the place is, that three great rogues have been apprehended at Olney, and are gone to prison,—one of whom will probably be hanged.

If thou hast any such things as rags (pardon the expression) belonging to thee, Mrs. Unwin is ready to beg them on her knees for the use of two miserable women on the point of producing,—we have not a rag left. When my odd book comes, they may come with it.

W. C.

¹ Staffordshire. Seat of Mr. Thomas Gifford.

² Mrs. Bodham.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, May 28, 1790.

MY DEAREST COZ,—I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath¹ you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least wish me to wear it.—Adieu, ever thine—in Homer-hurry,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

Weston, June 3, 1790.

You will wonder when I tell you that I, even I, am considered by people, who live at a great distance, as having interest and influence sufficient to procure a place at court for those who may happen to want one. I have accordingly been applied to within these few days by a Welshman,² with a wife and many children, to get him made poet-laureate as fast as possible. If thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a year, thou canst not do better than procure the office for him. I will promise thee, that he shall afford thee a hearty laugh in

¹ The Poet-Laureateship was rendered vacant by the death (21st May 1790) of Thomas Warton. Lady Hesketh had made the offer of her services to procure the office for Cowper. Ultimately a nonentity, Henry James Pye, was appointed.

² Mr. Walter Churchey. See also letter to Churchey, 24 Dec. 1790.

return every birthday, and every new year. He is an honest man.—Adieu!

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 6, 1790.

DEAREST COZ,—I should sooner have acknowledged the receipt of thy charity-box had I not been lately engaged more than usual, not in poetry alone, but in business also. I now tell you, however, that it came safe, to our great joy, and to the great joy especially of the two future mothers whose children were in some danger not only of coming naked from the womb, but of continuing naked afterwards. The money has been divided between them, and the linen; and by me they thank thee with unfeigned gratitude for thy bounty.

The business to which I allude above was my long unliquidated account with the Rev. Luke Heslop.¹ It has cost me many a fit of fretting, and many a time has sunk my spirits; it has indeed been almost a continual vexation to me these twenty years. The delay has been occasioned by himself, and were the account justly settled, the balance would be in my favour, for I have lost more by his negligence than I owe him for his services; yet notwithstanding these considerations which might, and ought perhaps to have consoled me, it is so detestable a thing to be considered as any man's debtor for so long a time, to be occasionally dunned for payment, and always liable to it, that it has plagued me past measure,

¹ Rev. Luke Heslop, Archdeacon of Bucks. See Letter of 25th Feb. 1789.

and was the cause of that depression of spirits which I mentioned in my last. I have however emerged sooner than I expected,—for nervous fevers, if they once seize me, do not often leave me in a hurry. I pray God to keep me from them, for to me they are the most dreadful of all evils.

Heslop called here about a fortnight since, at which time I told him in pretty strong and severe terms my whole mind concerning the manner in which he had treated me. A day or two ago I wrote to my old friend Sephus, telling him how much the affair had hurt me, and entreating him to sell stock immediately for satisfaction of my reverend creditor. My only fear now is that Joseph's friendship for me may determine him not to do it, and to insist on a regular balance being struck between us. Should this be the case the vexation will still continue, for Heslop is resolved never to go near him more, having been rather roughly handled by him when he saw him last. Thus stands the matter; with which I did not mean to have occupied all my paper; but having told thee that I have been indisposed in my spirits, I thought it necessary to tell thee also the cause. A few days will, I hope, rid me for ever of the subject.

I am happy that Mrs. Howe is so well pleased with what she has seen of my Homer, and will take care that the whole shall not disgrace the sample.

I dined yesterday at the Hall, where I spent my time merrily. Have no uneasiness about me, for I am, I thank God, at this present writing as well and in as good spirits as at any time these many years. Poor Mrs. Unwin, who was as much hurt as myself, is now well also, and sends you her best affections

and her best thanks for your kind answer to her solicitations.—I am, ever thine, WM. COWPER.

Thanks for the papers, and for the odd *Odd-yssey*.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, June 7, 1790.

MY DEAR JOHN,—You know my engagements, and are consequently able to account for my silence. I will not therefore waste time and paper in mentioning them, but will only say that, added to those with which you are acquainted, I have had other hindrances, such as business, and a disorder of my spirits, to which I have been all my life subject. At present I am, thank God! perfectly well both in mind and body. Of you I am always mindful, whether I write or not, and very desirous to see you. You will remember, I hope, that you are under engagements to us, and as soon as your Norfolk friends can spare you, you will fulfil them. Give us all the time you can, and all that they can spare to us!

You never pleased me more than when you told me you had abandoned your mathematical pursuits. It grieved me to think that you were wasting your time merely to gain a little Cambridge fame, not worth your having. I cannot be contented that your renown should thrive no where but on the banks of the Cam. Conceive a nobler ambition, and never let your honour be circumscribed by the paltry dimensions of an university! It is well that you have already, as you observe, acquired sufficient information in that science, to enable you to pass

creditably such examinations as I suppose you must hereafter undergo. Keep what you have gotten, and be content. More is needless.

You could not apply to a worse than I am to advise you concerning your studies. I was never a regular student myself, but lost the most valuable years of my life in an attorney's office, and in the Temple. I will not therefore give myself airs, and affect to know what I know not. The affair is of great importance to you, and you should be directed in it by a wiser than I. To speak, however, in very general terms on the subject, it seems to me that your chief concern is with history, natural philosophy, logic, and divinity. As to metaphysics, I know little about them. But the very little that I do know has not taught me to admire them. Life is too short to afford time even for serious trifles. Pursue what you know to be attainable, make truth your object, and your studies will make you a wise man! Let your divinity, if I may advise, be the divinity of the glorious Reformation: I mean in contradistinction to Arminianism, and all the *isms* that were ever broached in this world of error and ignorance.

The divinity of the Reformation is called Calvinism, but injuriously. It has been that of the Church of Christ in all ages. It is the divinity of St. Paul, and of St. Paul's Master, Who met him in his way to Damascus.

I have written in great haste, that I might finish if possible before breakfast. Adieu! Let us see you soon; the sooner the better. Give my love to the silent lady, the Rose, and all my friends around you.

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, June 8, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Among the many who love and esteem you, there is none who rejoices more in your felicity than myself. Far from blaming, I commend you much for connecting yourself, young as you are, with a well-chosen companion for life. Entering on the state with uncontaminated morals, you have the best possible prospect of happiness, and will be secure against a thousand and ten thousand temptations, to which, at an early period of life, in such a Babylon as you must necessarily inhabit, you would otherwise have been exposed. I see it too in the light you do, as likely to be advantageous to you in your profession. Men of business have a better opinion of a candidate for employment, who is married, because he has given bond to the world, as you observe, and to himself, for diligence, industry, and attention. It is altogether therefore a subject of much congratulation; and mine, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's, is very sincere. Samson at his marriage proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am no Samson, neither are you a Philistine. Yet expound to me the following, if you can.

*What are they, which stand at a distance from each other, and meet without ever moving?*¹

Should you be so fortunate as to guess it, you may propose it to the company, when you celebrate your nuptials; and if you can win thirty changes of raiment by it, as Samson did by his, let me tell you, they will be no contemptible acquisition to a young beginner.

¹ For solution see Letter of 13th Sept. 1790.

You will not, I hope, forget your way to Weston, in consequence of your marriage, where you and yours will be always welcome. W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, June 14, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I have hardly a scrap of paper belonging to me that is not scribbled over with blank verse ; and taking out your letter from a bundle of others, this moment, I find it thus inscribed on the seal side :

. . . meantime his steeds
Snorted, by Myrmidons detain'd, and loosed
From their own master's chariot, foam'd to fly.

You will easily guess to what they belong : and I mention the circumstance merely in proof of my perpetual engagement to Homer, whether at home or abroad ; for when I committed these lines to the back of your letter, I was rambling at a considerable distance from home. I set one foot on a mole-hill, placed my hat with the crown upward on my knee, laid your letter upon it, and with a pencil wrote the fragment that I have sent you. In the same posture I have written many and many a passage of a work which I hope soon to have done with. But all this is foreign to what I intended when I first took pen in hand. My purpose then was, to excuse my long silence as well as I could, by telling you that I am at present not only a labourer in verse, but in prose also, having been requested by a friend, to whom I could not refuse it, to translate for him a series of Latin letters received from a Dutch

minister¹ of the gospel at the Cape of Good Hope. With this additional occupation you will be sensible that my hands are full; and it is a truth that, except to yourself, I would, just at this time, have written to nobody.

I felt a true concern for what you told me in your last respecting the ill state of health of your much-valued friend Mr. Martyn. You say, if I knew half his worth, I should, with you, wish his longer continuance below. Now you must understand that, ignorant as I am of Mr. Martyn, except by your report of him, I do nevertheless sincerely wish it—and that, both for your sake and my own; nor less for the sake of the public. For your sake, because you love and esteem him highly; for the sake of the public, because, should it please God to take him before he has completed his great botanical² work, I suppose no other person will be able to finish it so well; and for my own sake, because I know he has a kind and favourable opinion beforehand of my translation, and consequently, should it justify his prejudice when it appears, he will stand my friend against an army of Cambridge critics. It would have been strange indeed if *self* had not peeped out on this subject. I beg you will present my best respects to him, and assure him that were it possible he could visit Weston, I should be most happy to receive him.

Mrs. Unwin would have been employed in transcribing my rhymes for you, would her health have

¹ Van Lier, converted by reading John Newton's *Cardiphonia*. His letters, written in Latin, contain an account of his religious experiences. Cowper, at Newton's request, translated them into English.

² Martyn's edition of Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary*. Practically a new work, published in 1807.

permitted ; but it is very seldom that she can write without being much a sufferer by it. She has almost a constant pain in her side, which forbids it. As soon as it leaves her, or much abates, she will be glad to work for you.

I am, like you and Mr. King, an admirer of clouds, but only when there are blue intervals, and pretty wide ones too, between them. One cloud is too much for me, but a hundred are not too many. So with this riddle and with my best respects to Mr. King, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's to you both, I remain, my dear madam, truly yours, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 17, 1790.

MY DEAR COZ,—Here am I, at eight in the morning, in full dress, going a visiting to Chicheley. We are a strong party, and fill two chaises; Mrs. F.¹ the elder, and Mrs. G.² in one; Mrs. F. the younger, and myself in another. Were it not that I shall find Chesters at the end of my journey, I should be inconsolable. That expectation alone supports my spirits; and even with this prospect before me, when I saw this moment a poor old woman coming up the lane opposite my window, I could not help sighing, and saying to myself—‘Poor, but happy old woman! thou art exempted by thy situation in life from riding in chaises, and making thyself fine in a morning, happier therefore in my account than I, who am under the cruel necessity of doing both. Neither dost thou write verses, neither hast thou ever heard of the name of

¹ Throckmorton.

² Gifford.

Homer, whom I am miserable to abandon for a whole morning !' This, and more of the same sort, passed in my mind on seeing the old woman above-said.

The troublesome business, with which I filled my last letter, is (I hope) by this time concluded, and Mr. Archdeacon satisfied. I can, to be sure, but ill afford to pay fifty pounds for another man's negligence, but would be happy to pay a hundred rather than be treated as if I were insolvent,—threatened with attorneys and bums. One would think that, living where I live, I might be exempted from trouble. But alas ! as the philosophers often affirm, there is no nook under heaven in which trouble cannot enter ; and perhaps had there never been one philosopher in the world, this is a truth that would not have been always altogether a secret.

I have made two inscriptions lately at the request of Thomas Gifford, Esq.,¹ who is sowing twenty acres with acorns on one side of his house,² and twenty acres with ditto on the other. He erects two memorials of stone on the occasion, that when posterity shall be curious to know the age of the oaks, their curiosity will be gratified.

My works therefore will not all perish, or will not all perish soon, for he has ordered his lapidary to cut the characters very deep, and in stone extremely hard. It is not in vain, then, that I have so long exercised the business of a poet. I shall at least reap the reward of my labours, and be immortal probably for many years.—Ever thine, W. C.

¹ Mrs. John Throckmorton's father.

² Chillington Hall, Staffordshire.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, June 22, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Villoison makes no mention of the serpent, whose skin, or bowels, or perhaps both, were honoured with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* inscribed upon them. But I have conversed with a living eye-witness of an African serpent long enough to have afforded skin and guts for the purpose. In Africa there are ants also, which frequently destroy these monsters. They are not much larger than ours, but they travel in a column of immense length, and eat through every thing that opposes them. Their bite is like a spark of fire. When these serpents have killed their prey, lion or tiger or any other large animal, before they swallow him, they take a considerable circuit round about the carcase, to see if the ants are coming, because when they have gorged their prey, they are unable to escape them. They are nevertheless sometimes surprised by them in their unwieldy state, and the ants make a passage through them. Now if you thought your own story of Homer, bound in snake skin, worthy of three notes of admiration, you cannot do less than add six to mine, confessing at the same time, that if I put you to the expense of a letter, I do not make you pay your money for nothing. But this account I had from a person of most unimpeached veracity.

I rejoice with you in the good Bishop's¹ removal to St. Asaph, and especially because the Norfolk parsons much more resemble the ants above-mentioned than he the serpent. He is neither of vast

¹ Bishop Bagot.

size, nor unwieldy, nor voracious; neither, I dare say, does he sleep after dinner, according to the practice of the said serpent. But harmless as he is, I am mistaken if his mutinous clergy did not sometimes disturb his rest, and if he did not find their bite, though they could not actually eat through him, in a degree resembling fire. Good men like him and peaceable, should have good and peaceable folks to deal with, and I heartily wish him such in his new diocese. But if he will keep the clergy to their business, he shall have trouble, let him go where he may; and this is boldly spoken, considering that I speak it to one of that reverend body. But ye are Jeremiah's basket of figs. Some of you could not be better, and some of you are stark naught. Ask the bishop himself, if this be not true! W. C.

TO MRS. BODHAM

Weston, June 29, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It is true that I did sometimes complain to Mrs. Unwin of your long silence. But it is likewise true, that I made many excuses for you in my own mind, and did not feel myself at all inclined to be angry, nor even much to wonder. There is an awkwardness, and a difficulty in writing to those whom distance and length of time have made in a manner new to us, that naturally gives us a check, when we would otherwise be glad to address them. But a time, I hope, is near at hand, when you and I shall be effectually delivered from all such constraints, and correspond as fluently as if our intercourse had suffered much less interruption.

You must not suppose, my dear, that though I

may be said to have lived many years with a pen in my hand, I am myself altogether at my ease on this tremendous occasion. Imagine rather, and you will come nearer to the truth, that when I placed this sheet before me I asked myself more than once, 'How shall I fill it?' One subject indeed presents itself, the pleasant prospect that opens upon me of our coming once more together; but that once exhausted, with what shall I proceed? Thus I questioned myself; but finding neither end nor profit of such questions, I bravely resolved to dismiss them all at once, and to engage in the great enterprise of a letter to my quondam Rose¹ at a venture. — There is great truth in a rant of Nat. Lee's, or of Dryden's, I know not which, who makes an enamoured youth say to his mistress,

'And nonsense shall be eloquence in love.'

For certain it is, that they who truly love one another are not very nice examiners of each other's style or matter; if an epistle comes, it is always welcome, though it be perhaps neither so wise nor so witty as one might have wished to make it. And now, my cousin, let me tell thee how much I feel myself obliged to Mr. Bodham for the readiness he expresses to accept my invitation. Assure him that, stranger as he is to me at present, and natural as the dread of strangers has ever been to me, I shall yet receive him with open arms, because he is your husband, and loves you dearly. That consideration alone will endear him to me, and I dare say that I shall not find it his only recommendation to my best affections. May the health of his relation

¹ Mrs Bodham's name was Anne, but Cowper had always called her 'Rose.'

(his mother I suppose) be soon restored, and long continued, and may nothing melancholy, of what kind soever, interfere to prevent our joyful meeting. Between the present moment and September our house is clear for your reception, and you have nothing to do but to give us a day or two's notice of your coming. In September we expect Lady Hesketh, and I only regret that our house is not large enough to hold all together, for were it possible that you could meet, you would love each other.

Mrs. Unwin bids me offer you her best love. She is never well, but always patient, and always cheerful, and feels beforehand that she shall be loth to part with you.

My love to all the dear Donnes of every name!—
Write soon, no matter about what. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

July 7, 1790.

Instead of beginning with the saffron-vested morning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron-vest to boast, I shall begin with you.

It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me: he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she

is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side, but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that He gives her largely.

The French, who like all lively folks are extreme in every thing, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly and treat their kings as they sometimes treated their idols. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely: I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, July 8, 1790.

MY DEAR JOHNNY,—You do well to perfect yourself on the violin. Only beware, that an amuse-

ment so very bewitching as music, especially when we produce it ourselves, do not steal from you ALL those hours that should be given to study. I can be well content, that it should serve you as a refreshment after severer exercises, but not that it should engross you wholly. Your own good sense will most probably dictate to you this precaution, and I might have spared you the trouble of it; but I have a degree of zeal for your proficiency in more important pursuits, that would not suffer me to suppress it.

Having delivered my conscience by giving you this sage admonition, I will convince you that I am a censor not over and above severe, by acknowledging in the next place that I have known very good performers on the violin very learned also; and my cousin, Dr. Spencer Madan, is an instance.

I am delighted that you have engaged your sister to visit us; for I say to myself, if John be amiable, what must Catherine be? For we males, be we angelic as we may, are always surpassed by the ladies. But know this, that I shall not be in love with either of you, if you stay with us only a few days, for you talk of a week or so. Correct this erratum, I beseech you, and convince us by a much longer continuance here, that it was one.

W. C.

Mrs. Unwin has never been well since you saw her. You are not passionately fond of letter-writing, I perceive, who have dropped a lady; but you will be a loser by the bargain; for one letter of hers, in point of real utility and sterling value, is

worth twenty of mine, and you will never have another from her, till you have earned it.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

Weston, July 16, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Taking it for granted that this will find you at Pertenhall, I follow you with an early line, and a hasty one, to tell you how much we rejoice to have seen yourself and Mr. King;¹ and how much regret you have left behind you. The wish that we expressed when we were together, Mrs. Unwin and I have more than once expressed since your departure, and have always felt it—that it had pleased Providence to appoint our habitations nearer to each other. This is a life of wishes, and they only are happy who have arrived where wishes cannot enter. We shall live now in hope of a second meeting, and a longer interview; which, if it please God to continue to you and to Mr. King your present measure of health, you will be able, I trust, to contrive hereafter. You did not leave us without encouragement to expect it; and I know that you do not raise expectations but with a sincere design to fulfil them.

Nothing shall be wanting, on our part, to accomplish in due time a journey to Pertenhall. But I am a strange creature, who am less able than any man living to project any thing out of the common course, with a reasonable prospect of performance. I have singularities, of which, I believe, at present you know nothing; and which would fill you with wonder if you knew them.

¹ Mr. and Mrs. King had visited Weston at the end of June 1790.

I will add, however, in justice to myself, that they would not lower me in your good opinion; though, perhaps, they might tempt you to question the soundness of my upper story. Almost twenty years have I been thus unhappily circumstanced; and the remedy is in the hand of God only. That I make you this partial communication on the subject, conscious, at the same time, that you are well worthy to be entrusted with the whole, is merely because the recital would be too long for a letter, and painful both to me and to you. But all this may vanish in a moment; and, if it please God, it shall. In the mean time, my dear Madam, remember me in your prayers, and mention me at those times, as one whom it has pleased God to afflict with singular visitations.

How I regret, for poor Mrs. Unwin's sake, your distance! She has no friend suitable as you to her disposition and character, in all the neighbourhood. Mr. King, too, is just the friend and companion with whom I could be happy; but such grow not in this country. Pray tell him that I remember him with much esteem and regard; and believe me, my dear Madam, with the sincerest affection,—Yours entirely,

WM. COWPER.

I have just left myself room to add Mrs. Unwin's true love.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

Weston, July 31, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter. If not, answer it without delay; and this injunction I give you, judging that it may

not be entirely unnecessary; for though I have seen you but once, and only for two or three days, I have found out that you are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who in the course of my life have, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself.

We long to see you again, and are only concerned at the short stay you propose to make with us. If time should seem to you as short at Weston, as it seems to us, your visit here will be gone 'as a dream when one awaketh, or as a watch in the night.'

It is a life of dreams, but the pleasantest one naturally wishes longest.

I shall find employment for you, having made already some part of the fair copy of the *Odyssey* a foul one. I am revising it for the last time, and spare nothing that I can mend. The *Iliad* is finished.

If you have Donne's poems,¹ bring them with you, for I have not seen them many years, and should like to look them over.

You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood,—one a gardener's, the other a tailor's: terrible performers both!

W. C.

¹ See Letter of 27th February 1790.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

August 11, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—That I may not seem unreasonably tardy in answering your last kind letter, I steal a few minutes from my customary morning business (at present the translation of Mr. Van Lier's Narrative), to inform you that I received it safe from the hands of Judith Hughes, whom we met in the middle of Hill-field. Desirous of gaining the earliest intelligence possible concerning Mrs. Newton, we were going to call on her, and she was on her way to us. It grieved us much that her news on that subject corresponded so little with our earnest wishes of Mrs. Newton's amendment. But if Dr. Benamer still gives hope of her recovery, it is not, I trust, without substantial reason for doing so; much less can I suppose that he would do it contrary to his own persuasions, because a thousand reasons that must influence, in such a case, the conduct of a humane and sensible physician, concur to forbid it. If it shall please God to restore her, no tidings will give greater joy to us. In the mean time, it is our comfort to know, that in any event you will be sure of supports invaluable, and that cannot fail you; though, at the same time, I know well, that, with your feelings, and especially on so affecting a subject, you will have need of the full exercise of all your faith and resignation. To a greater trial no man can be called, than that of being a helpless eyewitness of the sufferings of one he loves, and loves tenderly. This I know by experience: but it is long since I had any experience of those communications from

above, which alone can enable us to acquit ourselves, on such an occasion, as we ought. But it is otherwise with you, and I rejoice that it is so.

With respect to my own initiation into the secret of animal magnetism, I have a thousand doubts. Twice, as you know, I have been overwhelmed with the blackest despair; and at those times every thing in which I have been at any period of my life concerned, has afforded to the enemy a handle against me. I tremble, therefore, almost at every step I take, lest on some future similar occasion it should yield him opportunity, and furnish him with means to torment me. Decide for me, if you can; and in the mean time, present, if you please, my respectful compliments and very best thanks to Mr. Holloway, for his most obliging offer. I am, perhaps, the only man living who would hesitate a moment, whether, on such easy terms, he should or should not accept it. But if he finds another like me, he will make a greater discovery than even that which he has already made of the principles of this wonderful art. For I take it for granted, that he is the gentleman whom you once mentioned to me as indebted only to his own penetration for the knowledge of it.

I shall proceed, you may depend on it, with all possible despatch in your business. Had it fallen into my hands a few months later, I should have made quicker riddance; for before the autumn shall be ended, I hope to have done with Homer. But my first morning hour or two (now and then a letter which must be written excepted) shall always be at your service till the whole is finished.

Commending you and Mrs. Newton, with all the

little power I have of that sort, to His fatherly and tender care in Whom you have both believed, in which friendly office I am fervently joined by Mrs. Unwin, I remain, with our sincere love to you both, and to Miss Catlett, my dear friend, most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON (BOOKSELLER)

Sept. 7, 1790.

IT grieves me that after all I am obliged to go into public without the whole advantage of Mr. Fuseli's judicious strictures. My only consolation is, that I have not forfeited them by my own impatience. Five years are no small portion of a man's life, especially at the latter end of it; and in those five years, being a man of almost no engagements, I have done more in the way of hard work, than most could have done in twice the number. I beg you to present my compliments to Mr. Fuseli, with many and sincere thanks for the services that his own more important occupations would allow him to render me.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

Weston, Sept. 8, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We rejoice that, though unhorsed or rather horseless, you are come safe home again, and shall be happy to hear that you are mounted again, because our having the pleasure to see you here depends on it.

Mrs. Unwin, who is never well, is yet not worse than when you saw her last. As to myself, I am

particularly frisky, having this very day sent all Homer to London.

Our joint best love attends yourself and family,
and I am most truly yours, W. M. COWPER.

TO MRS. BODHAM

Weston, Sept. 9, 1790.

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I am truly sorry to be forced after all to resign the hope of seeing you and Mr. Bodham at Weston this year; the next may possibly be more propitious, and I heartily wish it may. Poor Catharine's unseasonable indisposition has also cost us a disappointment, which we much regret; and were it not that Johnny has made shift to reach us, we should think ourselves completely unfortunate. But him we have, and him we will hold as long as we can, so expect not very soon to see him in Norfolk. He is so harmless, cheerful, gentle, and good-tempered, and I am so entirely at my ease with him, that I cannot surrender him without a *needs must*, even to those who have a superior claim upon him. He left us yesterday morning, and whither do you think he is gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the book-seller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part with him no more, till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish that

I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first, to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less.

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

The Lodge, Sept. 13, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter was particularly welcome to me, not only because it came after a long silence, but because it brought me good news—news of your marriage, and consequently, I trust, of your happiness. May that happiness be durable as your lives, and may you be the *Felices ter et amplius* of whom Horace sings so sweetly! This is my sincere wish, and, though expressed in prose, shall serve as your epithalamium. You comfort me when you say that your marriage will not deprive us of the sight of you hereafter. If you do not wish that I should regret your union, you must make that assurance good as often as you have opportunity.

After perpetual versification during five years, I find myself at last a vacant man, and reduced to read for my amusement. My Homer is gone to the press, and you will imagine that I feel a void in consequence. The proofs, however, will be coming soon, and I shall avail myself with all my force of this last opportunity to make my work as perfect as I wish it. I shall not therefore be long time destitute of employment, but shall have sufficient to keep me occupied all the winter, and part of the ensuing spring, for Johnson purposes to publish either in March, April, or May. My very preface is finished. It did not cost me much trouble, being neither long nor learned. An appearance of learning I could easily have given to it by the help of the books with which you and another friend or two have supplied me, but I hate imposition, and should be sorry to owe a grain of reputation to any such practice. I have spoken my mind as freely as decency would permit on the subject of Pope's version, allowing him, at the same time, all the merit to which I think him entitled. I have given my reasons for translating in blank verse, and hold some discourse on the mechanism of it, chiefly with a view to obviate the prejudices of some people against it. I expatiate a little on the manner in which I think Homer ought to be rendered, and in which I have endeavoured to render him myself, and anticipated two or three cavils, to which I foresee that I shall be liable from the ignorant or uncandid, in order, if possible, to prevent them. These are the chief heads of my preface, and the whole consists of about twelve pages.

It is possible when I come to treat with Johnson

about the copy, I may want some person to negotiate for me; and knowing no one so intelligent as yourself in books, or so well qualified to estimate their just value, I shall beg leave to resort to and rely on you as my negotiator. But I will not trouble you unless I should see occasion. My cousin was the bearer of my MSS. to London. He went on purpose, and returns to-morrow. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate felicitations, added to my own. conclude me, my dear friend, sincerely yours,

W. C.

The trees of a colonnade will solve my riddle.¹

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

Weston Underwood, Sept. 16, 1790.

MY DEAR ROWLEY,—I have given you time to return to Dublin and to settle yourself there; and now perhaps you will find yourself at leisure to receive my thanks for the readiness with which you have resumed your enlisting labours, disagreeable in themselves, and which nothing but your friendship for him in whose service they are performed could render supportable. You will not think it sufficient, I trust, when you shall have completed your list, to send the money only, but will transmit the names of the subscribers also. Pardon a hint which could not possibly be wanted, except by an Hibernian, or by one who has lived long in Ireland.

You are happy who, I presume, have not to deal with booksellers and printers, the most dilatory of mankind, and who seem to exist only to torment and distract us miserable authors? My copy has

¹ See Letter to Rose of June 8, 1790.

been some weeks in Town, yet have I but this moment received the second proof-sheet. If you are possessed of any secret that will make a snail gallop—at least urge him to a trot, communicate it without delay, that I may accelerate with it the movements of these tedious vermin.

I find in my list the name of N. Westcomb, Esq. This, I presume, is he whom we were formerly wont to call Cousin Westcomb. I much respect him, and feel the obligation he has conferred on me, very sensibly, and if you have any correspondence with him, which, considering your intimacy in old times, seems very probable, I shall be obliged to you if you will tell him so. I cannot help considering my subscription as a sort of test of their constancy who formerly professed a kindness for me. They in whom a spark of that kindness survives will hardly fail to discover it on such an occasion, and seeing the affair in this light, I feel myself a little grieved and hurt that some names, which old friendship gave me a right to expect, are not to be found in my catalogue. The Lord Chancellor, however, has done handsomely, having twice honoured me with his name, once by solicitation, and in the second instance voluntarily. He is, like yourself, a man whose attachments are made of stuff that is proof against time and absence.

I revere your paternal character and am delighted with the anxiety you express about your children's welfare, yet at the same time am a little apprehensive lest your solitudes on that subject should so far exceed their proper limits as to make you at times unhappy. Remember, my friend, that He who gave them to you is able by His providence to

preserve them also. The great success of the Rowleys at the last election is a subject of congratulation, for which I ought to have left myself more room. I can now only say that I sincerely rejoice in it, and that I am most truly yours,

W. COWPER.

Will not your trip to Bath afford you an opportunity to take a peep at Weston? Some of your trips to England I hope will do it, for I should greatly rejoice to see you.†

TO JOSEPH HILL

Sept. 17, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I received last night a copy of my subscribers' names from Johnson, in which I see how much I have been indebted to yours and to Mrs. Hill's solicitations. Accept my best thanks, so justly due to you both. It is an illustrious catalogue, in respect of rank and title; but methinks I should have liked it as well had it been more numerous. The sum subscribed, however, will defray the expense of printing; which is as much as, in these unsubscribing days, I had any reason to promise myself. I devoutly second your droll wish that the booksellers may contend about me. The more the better. Seven times seven, if they please; and let them fight with the fury of Achilles,

Till every rubric-post be crimson'd o'er
With blood of booksellers, in battle slain
For me, and not a periwig untorn.

Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON (BOOKSELLER)

Weston, Oct. 3, 1790.

MR. NEWTON having again requested that the preface which he wrote for my first volume may be prefixed to it, I am desirous to gratify him in a particular that so emphatically bespeaks his friendship for me; and should my books see another edition, shall be obliged to you if you will add it accordingly.

I beg that you will not suffer your reverence either for Homer, or his translator, to check your continual examinations. I never knew with certainty, till now, that the marginal strictures I found in the *Task* proofs were yours. The justness of them, and the benefit I derived from them, are fresh in my memory, and I doubt not that their utility will be the same in the present instance.

TO MRS. KING

Weston Underwood, Oct. 5, 1790.

MY DEAR MADAM,—I am truly concerned that you have so good an excuse for your silence. Were it proposed to my choice, whether you should omit to write through illness or indifference to me, I should be selfish enough, perhaps, to find decision difficult for a few moments; but have such an opinion, at the same time, of my affection for you, as to be verily persuaded that I should at last make a right option, and wish you rather to forget me than to be afflicted. But there is One, wiser and more your friend than I can possibly be, who

appoints all your sufferings, and who, by a power altogether his own, is able to make them good for you.

I wish heartily that my verses¹ had been more worthy of the Counterpane, their subject. The gratitude I felt, when you brought it and gave it to me, might have inspired better; but a head full of Homer, I find, by sad experience, is good for little else. Lady Hesketh, who is here, has seen your gift, and pronounced it the most beautiful and best executed of the kind she ever saw.

I have lately received from my bookseller a copy of my subscribers' names, and do not find among them the name of Mr. Professor Martyn. I mention it, because you informed me, some time since, of his kind intention to number himself among my encouragers on this occasion; and because I am unwilling to lose, for want of speaking in time, the honour that his name will do me. It is possible, too, that he may have subscribed, and that his non-appearance may be owing merely to Johnson's having forgot to enter him. Perhaps you will have an opportunity to ascertain the matter. The catalogue will be printed soon, and published in the *Analytical Review*, as the last and most effectual way of advertising my translation; and the name of the gentleman in question will be particularly serviceable to me in this first edition of it.

My whole work is in the bookseller's hands, and ought by this time to be in the press. The next

¹ To Mrs. King, on her kind present to the author, a patchwork quilt of her own making. See Globe Edition, p. 374. Date of Poem, 14 August 1790. This quilt is now preserved in the Cowper Museum at Olney. It is a beautiful piece of work—as bright almost as on the day it was made.

spring is the time appointed for the publication. It is a genial season, when people who are ever good-tempered at all, are sure to be so; a circumstance well worthy of an author's attention, especially of mine, who am just going to give a thump on the outside of the critics' hive, that will probably alarm them all.

Mrs. Unwin, I think, is on the whole rather improved in her health since we had the pleasure of your short visit; I should say, the pleasure of your visit, and the pain of its shortness. Our joint best compliments attend yourself and Mrs. King.—I am, my dearest Madam, most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 15, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We were surprised and grieved at Mrs. Scott's¹ sudden departure; grieved, you may suppose, not for *her*, but for *him*, whose loss, except that in God he has an all-sufficient good, is irreparable. The day of separation between those who have loved long and well, is an awful day, inasmuch as it calls the Christian's faith and submission to the severest trial. Yet I account those happy, who, if they are severely tried, shall yet be supported, and be carried safely through. What would become of me on a similar occasion! I have one comfort, and only one: bereft of that, I should have nothing left to lean on; for my spiritual props have long since been struck from under me.

¹ Mrs. Scott, wife of Rev. Thomas Scott, the Commentator, died in September 1790.

I have no objection at all to being known as the translator of Van Lier's Letters, when they shall be published. Rather, I am ambitious of it, as an honour. It will serve to prove, that if I have spent much time to little purpose in the translation of Homer, some small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of.

The honour of your preface prefixed to my Poems will be on my side; for surely, to be known as the friend of a much-favoured minister of God's word, is a more illustrious distinction, in reality, than to have the friendship of any poet in the world to boast of.

We sympathise truly with you under all your tender concern for Mrs. Newton, and with her in all her sufferings from such various and discordant maladies. Alas! what a difference have twenty-three years made in us, and in our condition! for just so long it is since Mrs. Unwin and I came into Buckinghamshire. Yesterday was the anniversary of that memorable æra. Farewell.

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Oct. 26, 1790.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We should have been happy to have received from you a more favourable account of Mrs. Newton's health. Yours is indeed a post of observation, and of observation the most interesting. It is well that you are enabled to bear the stress and intenseness of it without prejudice to your own health, or impediment to your ministry.

The last time I wrote to Johnson, I made known to him your wishes to have your preface printed, and affixed, as soon as an opportunity shall offer; expressing, at the same time, my own desires to have it done. Whether I shall have any answer to my proposal, is a matter of much uncertainty; for he is always either too idle or too busy, I know not which, to write to me. Should you happen to pass his way, perhaps it would not be amiss to speak to him on the subject; for it is easier to carry a point by six words spoken, than by writing as many sheets about it. I have asked him hither, when my cousin Johnson shall leave us, which will be in about a fortnight; and should he come, will enforce the measure myself.

A yellow shower of leaves is falling continually from all the trees in the country. A few moments only seem to have passed since they were buds; and in few moments more, they will have disappeared. It is one advantage of a rural situation, that it affords many hints of the rapidity with which life flies, that do not occur in towns and cities. It is impossible for a man, conversant with such scenes as surround me, not to advert daily to the shortness of his existence here, admonished of it, as he must be, by ten thousand objects. There was a time when I could contemplate my present state, and consider myself as a thing of a day with pleasure; when I numbered the seasons as they passed in swift rotation, as a schoolboy numbers the days that interpose between the next vacation, when he shall see his parents and enjoy his home again. But to make so just an estimate of a life like this, is no longer

in my power. The consideration of my short continuance here, which was once grateful to me, now fills me with regret. I would live and live always, and am become such another wretch as Mæcenas was, who wished for long life, he cared not at what expense of sufferings. The only consolation left me on this subject is, that the voice of the Almighty can in one moment cure me of this mental infirmity. That He can, I know by experience; and there are reasons for which I ought to believe that He will. But from hope to despair is a transition that I have made so often, that I can only consider the hope that may come, and that sometimes I believe will, as a short prelude of joy to a miserable conclusion of sorrow that shall never end. Thus are my brightest prospects clouded, and thus to me is hope itself become like a withered flower, that has lost both its hue and its fragrance.

I ought not to have written in this dismal strain to you, in your present trying situation, nor did I intend it. You have more need to be cheered than to be saddened; but a dearth of other themes constrained me to choose myself for a subject, and of myself I can write no otherwise.

Adieu, my dear friend. We are well; and notwithstanding all that I have said, I am myself as cheerful as usual. Lady Hesketh is here, and in her company even I, except now and then for a moment, forget my sorrows.—I remain, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

Weston, October 31, 1790.

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,—I am not without expectations (too flattering perhaps) that I may receive a line from you to-day, but am obliged to write before it can arrive, that I may catch the opportunity of sending this to the post.

I saw Tom¹ yesterday; have seen him indeed twice or thrice in the course of the week, but our other interviews were casual; yesterday I called on purpose to pay my respects to him. The little man is well, save and except (if it deserves to be mentioned) a slight cold that affects him only at the nose, and which he owes to the change of our weather from sultry to very severe; his sister Tit I have not seen, but by the report of Mrs. Nunerly (if that be her name) and by the doctor's report also, she is in perfect health. You will be so good as not to make yourself uneasy in the smallest degree about Tom, suspecting that I represent the matter more favourably than truly, for I have told you all the worst.

Mrs. Nunerly desired me to tell you that she has not heard from Mrs. Gifford, which is the reason *you* have not heard from *her*.

Homer, at length, goes on merrily. The difficulty of procuring paper that pleased him was the cause of Johnson's tardiness, which I mentioned in my last. Henceforth, he promises me six sheets every week, at which I rejoice for two reasons, first because at that rate of proceeding we shall be ready for publication at the time appointed, and secondly

¹ Little Tom Gifford.

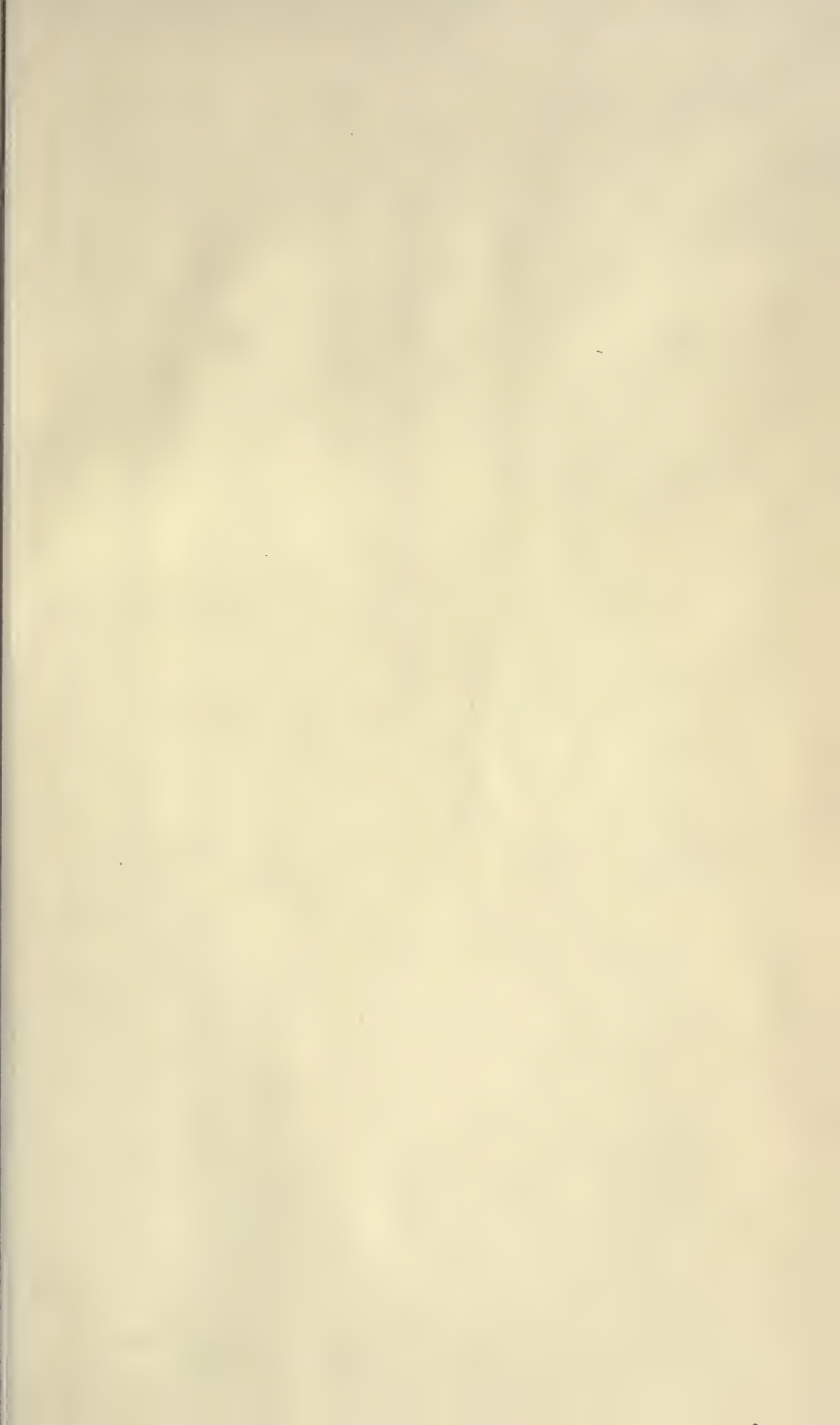
in the interval I shall never want employment. The list of subscribers' names that I sent to the Hall a short time before you left it was imperfect, the copyist having overlooked, in his haste to obey my commands, no fewer than forty and upwards. I flatter myself therefore, that with such additions as will not fail to be made before the subscription closes, the names will amount to full three hundred, which will pay the whole expense of printing seven hundred copies, which will be the number of the first impression.

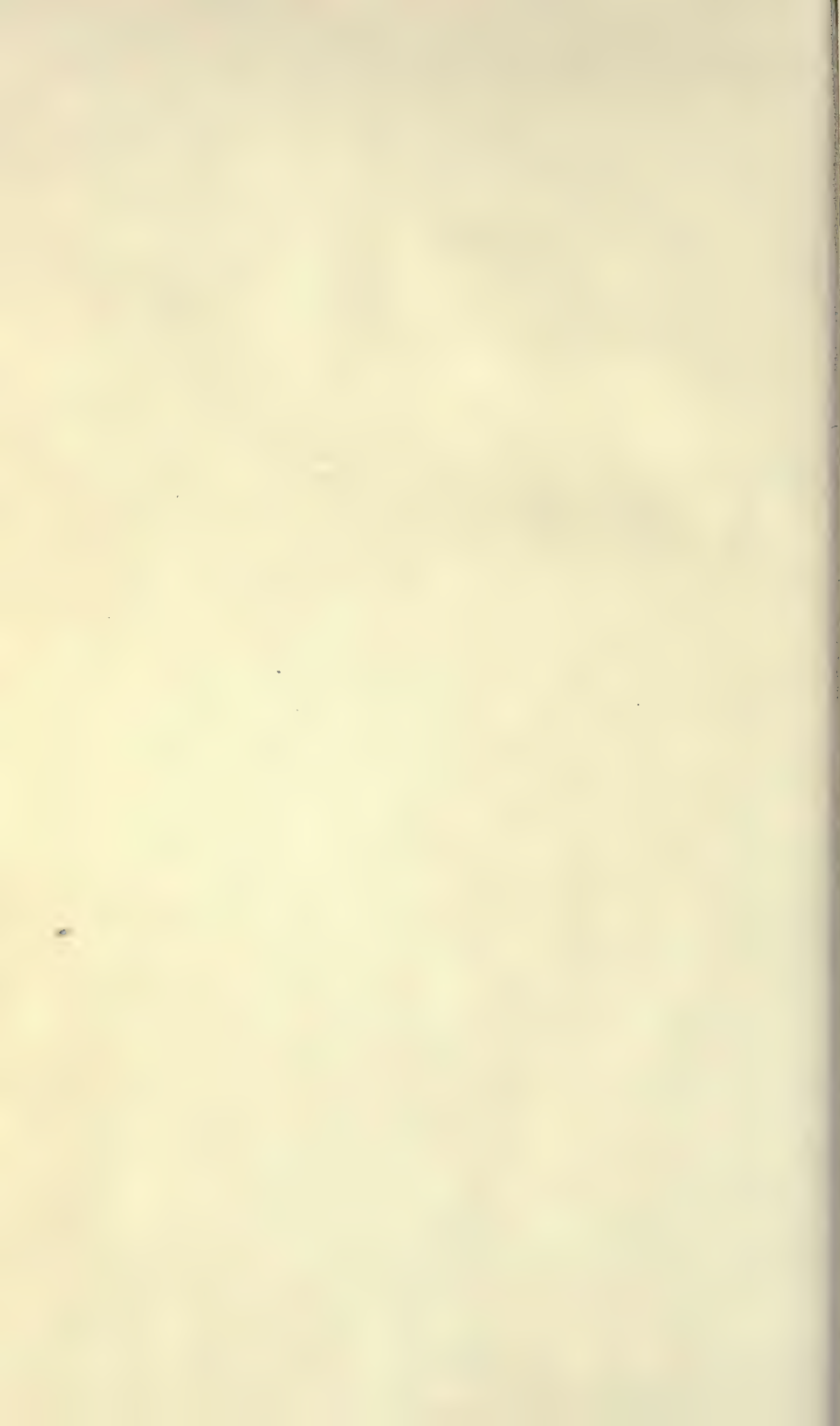
A pretty subject this to entertain a fair lady withal! Rue the day that gave you a poet for a correspondent; every man writes most of that which he has most at heart, and authors of course about themselves and their labours.

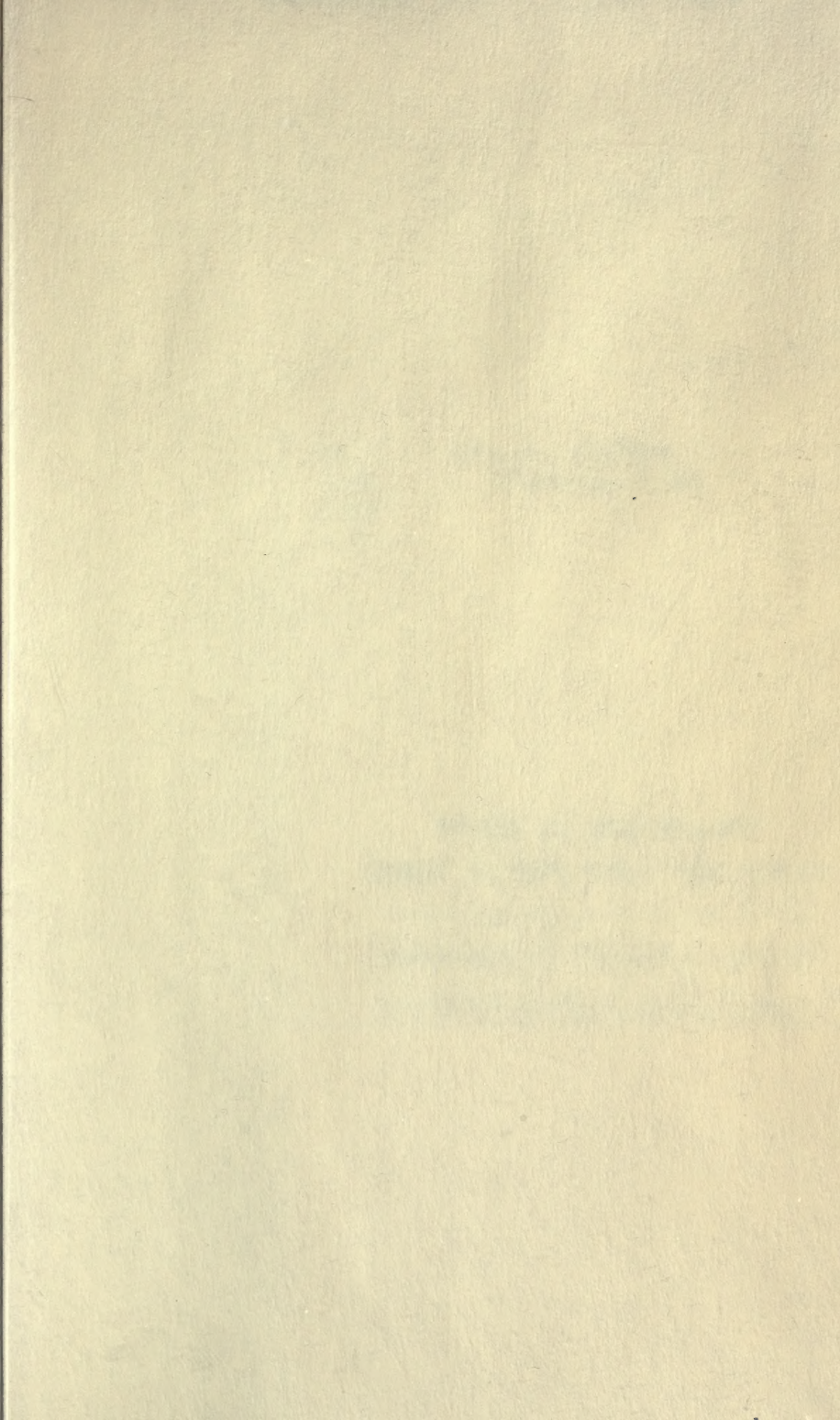
Mrs. Unwin is as well as usual, my female and male cousin are in perfect health, and all unite with me in affectionate remembrances to our dear friends in Norfolk. Adieu!—Ever yours, Toot.¹

¹ Tom Gifford used to call the poet 'Mr. Toot.' This was the nearest he could get to 'Mr. Cowper' (pronounced, of course, *Cooper*). See Letter of February 1791.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME









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Correspondence

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